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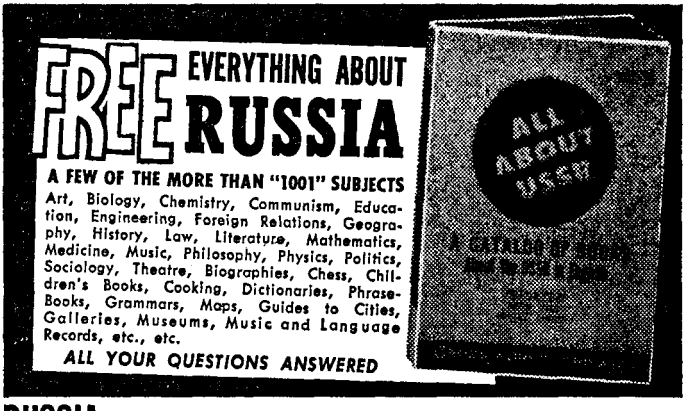
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KENNETH BURKE

Definition of Man

I

FIRST, A FEW WORDS ON DEFINITION in general. Let's admit it: I see in a definition the critic's equivalent of a lyric, or of an aria in opera. Also, we might note that, when used in an essay, as with Aristotle's definition of tragedy in his Poetics, a definition so sums things up that all the properties attributed to the thing defined can be as though "derived" from the definition. In actual development, the definition may be the last thing a writer hits upon. Or it may be formulated somewhere along the line. But logically it is prior to the observations that it summarizes. Thus, insofar as all the attributes of the thing defined fit the definition, the definition should be viewed as "prior" in this purely non-temporal sense of priority.

Definitions are also the critic's equivalent of the lyric (though a poet might not think so!) in that the writer usually "hits on them." They are "break-throughs," and thus are somewhat hard to come by. We should always keep trying for them—but they don't always seem to "click."

A definition should have just enough clauses, and no more. However, each clause should be like a chapter-head, under which appropriate observations might be assembled, as though derived from it.

I am offering my Definition of Man in the hope of either persuading the reader that it fills the bill, or of prompting him to decide what should be added, or subtracted, or in some way modified.

II

Man is the symbol-using animal.

Granted, it doesn't come as much of a surprise. But our definition is being offered not for any possible paradoxical value. The aim is to get as essential a set of clauses as possible, and to meditate on each of them.

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I remember one day at college when, on entering my philosophy class, I found all blinds up and the windows open from the top, while a bird kept flying nervously about the ceiling. The windows were high, they extended almost to the ceiling; yet the bird kept trying to escape by batting against the ceiling rather than dipping down and flying out one of the open windows. While it kept circling thus helplessly over our heads, the instructor explained that this was an example of a "tropism." This particular bird's instinct was to escape by flying *up,* he said; hence it ignored the easy exit through the windows.

But how different things would be if the bird could speak and we could speak his language. What a simple statement would have served to solve his problem. "Fly down just a foot or so, and out one of those windows."

Later, I ran across another example that I cite because it has further implications, with regard to a later clause in our definition. I witnessed the behavior of a wren that was unquestionably a genius within the terms of its species. The parents had succeeded in getting all of a brood off the nest except one particularly stubborn or backward fellow who still remained for a couple of days after the others had flown. Despite all kinds of threats and cajolery, he still lingered, demanding and getting the rations which all concerned seem to consider his rightful lot. Then came the moment of genius. One of the parent wrens came to the nest with a morsel of food. But instead of simply giving it to the noisy youngster, the parent bird held it at a distance. The fledgeling in the nest kept stretching its neck out farther and farther with its beak gaping until, of a sudden, instead of merely putting the morsel of food into the bird's mouth, the parent wren clamped its beak shut on the young one's lower mandible, and with a slight jerk caused the youngster, with his outstretched neck, to lose balance and tumble out of the nest.

Surely this was an "act" of genius. This wren had discovered how to use the principle of leverage as a way of getting a young bird off the nest. Had that exceptionally brilliant wren been able to conceptualize this discovery in such terms as come easy to symbol-systems, we can imagine him giving a dissertation on "The Use of the Principle of Leverage as an Improved Method for Unnesting Birds or Debirding a Nest." And within a few years the invention would spread throughout all birddom, with an incal-

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culable saving in bird-hours as compared with the traditional turbulent and inefficient method still in general practice.

There are three things to note about this incident:

(1) The ability to describe this method in words would have readily made it possible for all other birds to take over this same "act" of genius, though they themselves might never have hit upon it.

(2) The likelihood is that even this one wren never used the method again. For the ability to conceptualize implies a kind of *attention* without which this innovation could probably not advance beyond the condition of a mere accident to the condition of an invention.

(3) On the happier side, there is the thought that at least, through lack of such ability, birds are spared our many susceptibilities to the ways of demagogic spellbinders. They cannot be filled with fantastic hatreds for alien populations they know about mainly by mere hearsay, or with all sorts of unsettling new expectations, most of which could not possibly turn out as promised.

The "symbol-using animal," yes, obviously. But can we bring ourselves to realize just what that formula implies, just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol-systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present? In school, as they go from class to class, students turn from one idiom to another. The various courses in the curriculum are in effect but so many different terminologies. And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced first-hand, the whole over-all "picture" is but a construct of our symbol-systems. To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naive verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.

In responding to words, with their overt and covert modes of

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persuasion ("progress" is a typical one that usually sets expectations to vibrating), we like to forget the kind of relation that really prevails between the verbal and the non-verbal. In being a link between us and the non-verbal, words are by the same token a screen separating us from the non-verbal—though the statement gets tangled in its own traces, since so much of the "we" that is separated from the non-verbal by the verbal would not even exist were it not for the verbal (or for our symbolicity in general, since the same applies to the symbol-systems of dance, music, painting, and the like).

A road map that helps us easily find our way from one side of the continent to the other owes its great utility to its exceptional existential poverty. It tells us absurdly little about the trip that is to be experienced in a welter of detail. Indeed, its value for us is in the very fact that it is so essentially inane.

Language referring to the realm of the non-verbal is necessarily talk about things in terms of what they are not—and in this sense we start out beset by a paradox. Such language is but a set of labels, signs for helping us find our way about. Indeed, they can even be so useful that they help us to invent ingenious ways of threatening to destroy ourselves. But even accuracy of this powerful sort does not get around the fact that such terms are sheer emptiness, as compared with the substance of things they name. Nor is such abstractness confined to the language of scientific prose. Despite the concrete richness of the imagery in Keats's poems, his letters repeatedly refer to his art as "abstract." And the same kind of considerations would apply to the symbol-systems of all other arts. Even so bodily a form of expression as the dance is abstract in this sense. (Indeed, in this regard it is so abstract that, when asking students to sum up the gist of a plot, I usually got the best results from dance majors, with music students a close second. Students specializing in literature or the social sciences tended to get bogged down in details. They were less apt at "abstracting.")

When a bit of talking takes place, just what is doing the talking? Just where are the words coming from? Some of the motivation must derive from our animality, and some from our symbolicity. We hear of "brain-washing," of schemes whereby an "ideology" is imposed upon people. But should we stop at that? Should we not also see the situation the other way around? For was not the

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"brainwasher" also similarly motivated? Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us? An "ideology" is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An "ideology" is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it.

I am saying in one way what St. Paul said in another when he told his listeners that "Faith comes from hearing." He had a doctrine which, if his hearers were persuaded to accept it, would direct a body somewhat differently from the way it would have moved and been moved in its daily rounds under the earlier pagan dispensation. Consider the kind of German boys and girls, for instance, who became burghers in the old days, who during the period of inflation and U.S.-financed reparations-payments after the first World War wanted but to be Wandering Birds, and who with the rise of the Third Reich were got to functioning as Hitlerite fiends.

With regard to this first clause in our definition (man as the "symbol-using" animal) it has often been suggested that "symbol-making" would be a better term. I can go along with that emendation. But I'd want to add one further step. Then, for the whole formula we'd have: the "symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal."

In referring to the misuse of symbols, I have in mind not only such demagogic tricks as I have already mentioned. I also think of "psychogenic illnesses," violent dislocations of bodily motion due to the improperly criticized action of symbolicity. A certain kind of food may be perfectly wholesome, so far as its sheer material nature is concerned. And people in some areas may particularly prize it. But our habits may be such that it seems to us loathsome; and under those conditions, the very thought of eating it may be nauseating to us. (The most drastic instance is, of course, provided by the ideal diet of cannibals.) When the body rebels at such thoughts, we have a clear instance of the ways whereby the realm of symbolicity may affect the sheerly biologic motions of animality. Instances of "hexing" are of the same sort (as when a tribesman, on entering his tent, finds there the sign that for some reason those in authority have decreed his death by magic, and he

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promptly begins to waste away and die under the burden of this sheer thought).

A merely funny example concerns an anecdote told by the anthropologist, Franz Boas. He had gone to a feast being given by Esquimaux. As a good anthropologist, he would establish rapport by eating what they ate. But there was a pot full of what he took to be blubber. He dutifully took some, and felt sick. He went outside the igloo to recover. There he met an Esquimau woman, who was scandalized when she heard that they were serving blubber. For they hadn't told her! She rushed in—but came out soon after in great disgust. It wasn't blubber at all, it was simply dumplings. Had the good savant only known, he could have taken dumplings in his stride. But it was a battle indeed for him to hold them down when he thought of them as blubber!

So, in defining man as the symbol-using animal, we thereby set the conditions for asking: Which motives derive from man's animality, which from his symbolicity, and which from the combination of the two? Physicality is, of course, subsumed in animality. And though the *principles* of symbolism are not reducible to sheerly physical terms (quite as the rules of football are not so reducible despite the physicality of the players' hulks and motions as such), the meanings cannot be conceived by empirical organisms except by the aid of a sheerly physical dimension.

One further point, and we shall have finished with our first clause. In his analysis of dream-symbolism, Freud laid great stress upon the two processes of "condensation" and "displacement." His observations are well-taken. But, since we are here using the term "symbolism" in a much wider sense, we might remind ourselves that the processes of "condensation" and "displacement" are not confined merely to the symbolism of dreams and neurosis, but are also an aspect of normal symbol-systems. A fundamental resource "natural" to symbolism is *substitution*. For instance, we can paraphrase a statement; if you don't get it one way, we can try another way. We translate English into French, Fahrenheit into Centigrade, or use the Greek letter *pi* to designate the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, otherwise stated as 3.14159. . . In this sense, substitution is a quite rational resource of symbolism. Yet it is but a more general aspect of what Freud meant by "displacement" (which is a confused kind of substitution).

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Or, as Horne Tooke pointed out a century and a half ago, a typical resource of language is abbreviation. And obviously, abbreviation is also a kind of substitution, hence a kind of "displacement," while it is also necessarily a kind of "condensation." And language is an abbreviation radically. If I refer to Mr. Jones by name, I have cut countless corners, as regards the particularities of that particular person. Or if I say, "Let's make a fire," think of what all I have left out, as regards the specific doing. Or if I give a book a title, I thereby refer to, while leaving unsaid, all that is subsumed under that title. Thus, condensation also can be viewed as a species of substitution. And a quite "rational" kind of "condensation" has taken place if, instead of referring to "tables," "chairs," and "rugs," I refer to "furniture," or if we put "parents" for "mother and father," and "siblings" for "brothers or sisters."

To say as much is to realize how many muddles such as Freud is concerned with may also be implicit in the symbols of "condensation" in his particular sense of the term. For my remarks are not intended as a "refutation" of Freud's terminology. By all means, my haggling about "condensation" and "displacement" as aspects of *all* symbolizing is not meant to question his line of investigation. All I am saying is that there still are some dividing lines to be drawn between the two realms (of symbolism in his sense and symbolism in general).

In any case, Freud (like Frazer) gives us ample grounds for trying never to forget that, once emotional involvement is added to symbolism's resources of substitution (which included the invitations to both condensation and displacement) the conditions are set for the symbol-using animal, with its ailments both physically and symbolically engendered, to tinker with such varying kinds of substitution as we encounter in men's modes of penance, expiation, compensation, paying of fines in lieu of bodily punishment, and cult of the scapegoat.

Obviously, to illustrate this point, there is an embarrassment of riches everywhere we choose to look, in the history of mankind. But, almost by accident, let us pick one, from a book, *Realm of the Incas,* by Victor W. Von Hagen. I refer to the picture of a

> propitiatory cairn, called *apacheta,* found in all of the high places of Peru on the ancient road. As heavily laden travelers passed along the road, they placed a stone on the *apacheta* as a symbol of the burden, "and so left their tiredness behind."

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We are further told that "The Persians, the Chinese, and the Greeks adopted more or less the same custom."

Substitution sets the condition for "transcendence," since there is a technical sense in which the name for a thing can be said to "transcend" the thing named (by making for a kind of "ascent" from the realm of motion and matter to the realm of essence and spirit). The subterfuges of euphemism can carry this process still further, culminating in the resources of idealization that Plato perfected through his dialectic of the Upward Way and Downward Way.

The designation of man as the symbol-using animal parallels the traditional formulas, "rational animal" and *Homo sapiens*—but with one notable difference. These earlier versions are honorific, whereas the idea of symbolicity implies no such temptation to self-flattery, and to this extent is more admonitory. Such definitions as "two-footed land-animal" (referred to in Aristotle's *Topics*) or "featherless biped" (referred to in Spinoza's *Ethics*) would be inadequate because they would confine the horizon to the realm of motion.

So much for our first clause.

III

The second clause is: *Inventor of the negative*. I am not wholly happy with the word, "inventor." For we could not properly say that man "invented" the negative unless we can also say that man is the "inventor" of language itself. So far as sheerly empirical development is concerned, it might be more accurate to say that language and the negative "invented" man. In any case, we are here concerned with the fact that there are no negatives in nature, and that this ingenious addition to the universe is solely a product of human symbol-systems. In an age when we are told, even in song, to "accentuate the positive," and when some experts in verbalization make big money writing inspirational works that praise "the power of positive thinking," the second clause of my definition must take on the difficult and thankless task of celebrating that peculiarly human marvel, the negative.

I have discussed elsewhere what an eye-opener the chapter, "The Idea of Nothing," was to me, in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. It jolted me into realizing that there are no negatives in nature,

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where everything simply is what it is and as it is. To look for negatives in nature would be as absurd as though you were to go out hunting for the square root of minus-one. The negative is a function peculiar to symbol-systems, quite as the square root of minus-one is an implication of a certain mathematical symbol-system.

The quickest way to demonstrate the sheer symbolicity of the negative is to look at any object, say, a table, and to remind yourself that, though it is exactly what it is, you could go on for the rest of your life saying all the things that it is not. "It is not a book, it is not a house, it is not Times Square," etc., etc.

One of the negative's prime uses, as Bergson points out, involves its role with regard to unfulfilled expectations. If I am expecting a certain situation, and a different situation occurs, I can say that the expected situation did *not* occur. But so far as the actual state of affairs is concerned, some situation positively prevails, and that's that. If you are here but someone is expecting to meet you elsewhere, he will *not* meet you elsewhere because you positively *are* here. I can ask, "Does the thermometer read 54?" And if it registers anything in the world but 54, your proper answer can be "It is not 54." Yet there's no such thing as it's simply *not* being 54; it *is* 53, or 55, or whatever.

However, I would make one change of emphasis with regard to Bergson's fertile chapter. His stress is a bit too "Scientistic" for specifically "Dramatistic" purposes. Thus, in keeping with the stress upon matters of knowledge, he stresses the propositional negative, "It *is* not." Dramatistically, the stress should be upon the hortatory negative, "Thou *shalt* not." The negative begins not as a resource of definition or information, but as a command, as "Don't." Its more "scientistic" potentialities develop later. And whereas Bergson is right in observing that we can't have an "idea of nothing" (that we must imagine a black spot, or something being annihilated, or an abyss, or some such), I submit that we *can* have an "idea of No," an "idea of don't." The Existentialists may amuse themselves and bewilder us with paradoxes about *le Néant,* by the sheer linguistic trick of treating no-thing as an abstruse kind of something. It's good showmanship. But there's no paradox about the idea of "don't," and a child can learn its meaning early.

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No, I must revise that statement somewhat. In one sense, there is a paradox about "don't." For the negative is but a *principle,* an *idea,* not a name for a *thing.* And thus, whereas an injunction such as "thou shalt not kill" is understandable enough as a negative *idea,* it also has about its edges the positive *image* of killing. But the main point is: Though a child may not always obey the "thou shalt not," and though there may inevitably be, in the offing, an image positively inviting disobedience, the child "gets the idea."

In this sense, though we can't have an "idea of nothing," we can have an "idea of no." When first working on the negative, I thought of looking through the documents on the training of Helen Keller and Laura Bridgeman, whose physical privations made it so difficult to teach them language. And in both cases the records showed that the hortatory negative was taught first, and it was later applied for use as propositional negative, without explicit recognition of the change in application.

There is a superbly relevant passage in Emerson's early long essay, *Nature,* in the chapter "Discipline," a paragraph ending thus: All things "shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong, and echo the ten commandments." In our scheme, this could be presented thus: "Reverse the statement, start with the principle of negation as in the Mosaic decalogue, and everything encountered along your way will be negatively infused."

In other words, if our character is built of our responses (positive or negative) to the thou-shalt-not's of morality, and if we necessarily approach life from the standpoint of our personalities, will not all experience reflect the genius of this negativity? Laws are essentially negative; "mine" equals "not thine"; insofar as property is not protected by the thou-shalt-not's of either moral or civil law, it is not protected at all.

The negative principle in morals is often hidden behind a realm of quasi-positives. One can appreciate this situation most readily by thinking of monastic discipline. The day may be filled with a constant succession of positive acts. Yet they are ultimately guided or regulated by proscriptive principles, involving acquiescence to vows consciously and conscientiously taken, while such vows come to fulfillment formally in such admonitions as are embodied in the Decalogue. Next, bearing in mind such clear evidence of the moralistic negativity that underlies the "quasi-

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positives" of the monastic rituals and routines, look at sheerly secular ambitions, with their countless ways of "justifying" oneself—and all such efforts too will be seen for what they are, not simply positives, but "quasi-positives," countless improvised ways of responding to the negativity so basic to man as moral agent.

Thus, all definitions stressing man as moral agent would tie in with this clause. If I may quote a relevant passage from a recent book of mine, *The Rhetoric of Religion:*

> *Action* involves *character,* which involves *choice*—and the *form* of choice attains its perfection in the distinction between Yes and No (shall and shall-not, will and will-not). Though the concept of sheer *motion* is non-ethical, *action* implies the ethical, the human personality. Hence the obvious close connection between the ethical and negativity, as indicated in the Decalogue.[1]

Is more needed on this point? We might say a few words about the role of antithesis in what are often called "polar" terms, not just Yes-No, but such similarly constructed pairs as: true-false, order-disorder, cosmos-chaos, success-failure, peace-war, pleasure-pain, clean-unclean, life-death, love-hate. These are to be distinguished from sheerly positive terms. The word "table," for instance, involves no thought of counter-table, anti-table, non-table, or un-table (except perhaps in the inventions of our quite positively negative-minded poet, E. E. Cummings).

We need not now decide whether, in such paired opposites, the positive or the negative member of the pair is to be considered as essentially prior. We can settle for the indubitable fact that all *moral* terms are of this polar sort. And we can settle merely for the fact that such positives and negatives imply each other. However, in a hit-and-run sort of way, before hurrying on, I might avow that I personally would treat the negative as in principle prior, for this reason: (1) Yes and No imply each other; (2) in their role as opposites, they *limit* each other; (3) but limitation itself is the "negation of part of a divisible quantum." (I am quoting from the article on Fichte in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* eleventh edition.)

There is an implied sense of negativity in the ability to use words at all. For to use them properly, we must know that they are *not* the things they stand for. Next, since language is extended by

[1] It suggests the thought that our second clause might be rephrased: "Moralized by the negative."

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metaphor which gradually becomes the kind of dead metaphor we call abstraction, we must know that metaphor is *not* literal. Further, we cannot use language maturely until we are spontaneously at home in irony. (That is, if the weather is bad, and someone says, "What a beautiful day!" we spontaneously know that he does *not* mean what the words say on their face. Children, before reaching "the age of reason," usually find this twist quite disturbing, and are likely to object that it is *not* a good day. Dramatic irony, of course, carries such a principle of negativity to its most complicated perfection.)

Our tendency to write works on such topics as "The Spirit of Christianity," or "The Soul of Islam," or "The Meaning of Judaism," or "Buddha and Eternity," or "Hinduism and Metempsychosis," leads us to overlook a strongly negativistic aspect of religions. I refer here not just to the principle of moral negativity already discussed, but also to the fact that religions are so often built *antithetically* to other persuasions. Negative motivation of this sort is attested by such steps as the formation of Christianity in opposition of paganism, the formation of Protestant offshoots in opposition to Catholicism, and the current reinvigoration of church-going, if not exactly of religion, in opposition to communism. So goes the dialectic!

Only one more consideration, and we are through with thoughts on this clause in our definition:

In an advertising world that is so strong on the glorification of the positive (as a way of selling either goods or bads), how make the negative enticing? At times the job has been done negatively, yet effectively, by the threat of hell. But what sanctions can we best build on now?

What a notable irony we here confront! For some of man's greatest acts of genius are in danger of transforming millions and millions of human agents into positive particles of sheer motion that go on somehow, but that are negative indeed as regards even the minimum expectations to which we might feel entitled.

And what is this new astounding irony? Precisely the fact that all these new positive powers developed by the new technology have introduced a vast new era of negativity. For they are deadly indeed, unless we make haste to develop the controls (the negatives, the thou-shalt-not's) that become necessary, if these great powers are to be kept from getting out of hand.

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Somewhat ironically, even as the possibilities of ultimate man-made suicide beset us, we also face an opposite kind of positive technologic threat to the resources of our moral negativity. I refer to the current "population explosion." In earlier days, the problem was solved automatically by plagues, famines, high rate of infant mortality, and such. But now the positive resources of technology have undone much of those natural "adjustments," so that new burdens are placed upon the Muscles of Negativity as the need arises for greater deliberate limitation of offspring.

However, ironically again, we should not end our discussion of this clause until we have also reminded ourselves: There is a kind of aesthetic negativity whereby any moralistic thou-shalt-not provides material for our entertainment, as we pay to follow imaginary accounts of "deviants" who, in all sorts of ingenious ways, are represented as violating these very Don'ts.

IV

Third clause: *Separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making.* It concerns the fact that even the most primitive of tribes are led by inventions to depart somewhat from the needs of food, shelter, sex as defined by the survival standards of sheer animality. The implements of hunting and husbandry, with corresponding implements of war, make for a set of habits that become a kind of "second nature," as a special set of expectations, shaped by custom, comes to seem "natural." (I recall once when there was a breakdown of the lighting equipment in New York City. As the newspapers the next day told of the event, one got almost a sense of mystical terror from the description of the darkened streets. Yet but fifty miles away, that same evening, we had been walking on the unlit road by our house in the country, in a darkness wholly "natural." In the "second nature" of the city, something so natural as dark roadways at night was weirdly "unnatural.")

This clause is designed to take care of those who would define man as the "tool-using animal" (*homo faber, homo economicus,* and such). In adding this clause, we are immediately reminded of the close tie-up between tools and language. Imagine trying to run a modern factory, for instance, without the vast and often ungainly nomenclatures of the various technological specialties, without instructions, education, specifications, filing systems, accountancy

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(including mathematics and money or some similar counters). And I already referred to the likelihood that the development of tools requires a kind of attention not possible without symbolic means of conceptualization. The connection between tools and language is also observable in what we might call the "second level" aspect of both. I refer to the fact that, whereas one might think of other animals as using certain rudiments of symbolism and rudimentary tools (for instance, when an ape learns to use a stick as a means of raking in a banana that the experimenter has purposely put beyond arm's length), in both cases the "reflexive" dimension is missing. Animals do not use words about words (as with the definitions of a dictionary)—and though an ape may even learn to put two sticks together as a way of extending his reach in case the sticks are so made that one can be fitted into the other, he would not take a knife and deliberately hollow out the end of one stick to make possible the insertion of the other stick. This is what we mean by the reflexive or second-level aspect of human symbolism. And it would presumably apply also to such complex sign-systems as bees apparently have, to spread information about the distance and direction of a newly discovered food supply. Apparently investigators really have "cracked" such a code in certain dance-like motions of bees—but we should hardly expect ever to find that student bees are taught the language by teacher bees, or that there are apiaries where bees formulate the grammar and syntax of such signalling. "Information" in the sense of sheer motion is not thus "reflexive," but rather is like that of an electric circuit where, if a car is on a certain stretch of track, it automatically turns off the current on the adjoining piece of track, so that any car on that other piece of track would stop through lack of power. The car could be said to behave in accordance with this "information."

However, in saying that the human powers of symbolicity are interwoven with the capacity for making tools (and particularly for making tools that make tools), we still haven't answered one objection. If the two powers involve each other, if the same reflexive trait is characteristic of both, why start with symbol-using rather than with tool-making? I'd propose an answer of this sort:

Formally, is not the choice implicit in the very act of definition itself? If we defined man first of all as the tool-using animal (or,

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old style, as *homo faber* rather than as *homo sapiens*), our definition would not be taking into account the "priority" of its very own nature as a definition. Inasmuch as definition is a symbolic act, it must begin by explicitly recognizing its formal grounding in the *principle* of definition as an act. In choosing *any definition at all,* one implicitly represents man as the kind of animal that is capable of definition (that is to say, capable of symbolic action). Thus, even if one views the powers of speech and mechanical invention as mutually involving each other, in a technical or formal sense one should make the implications explicit by treating the gifts of symbolicity as the "prior" member of the pair.

Also, we should note that one especially good result follows from this choice. Those who begin with the stress upon *tools* proceed to define language itself as a species of tool. But though instrumentality is an important aspect of language, we could not properly treat it as the *essence* of language. To define language simply as a species of tool would be like defining metals merely as species of tools. Or like defining sticks and stones simply as primitive weapons. Edward Sapir's view of language as "a collective means of expression" points in a more appropriate direction. The instrumental value of language certainly accounts for much of its development, and this instrumental value of language may even have been responsible for the survival of language itself (by helping the language-using animal to survive), quite as the instrumental value of language in developing atomic power now threatens the survival of the language-using animal; but to say as much is not by any means to say that language is in its essence a tool. Language is a species of action, symbolic action—and its nature is such that it can be used as a tool.

In any case, the tool-making propensities envisioned in our third clause result in the complex network of material operations and properties, public or private, that arise through men's ways of livelihood, with the different *classes* of society that arise through the division of labor and the varying relationships to the property structure. And that brings us to our fourth clause.

V

Fourth clause: *Goaded by the spirit of hierarchy.* But if that

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sounds too weighted, we could settle for, "Moved by a sense of order." Under this clause, of course, would fall the incentives of organization and status. In my *Rhetoric of Motives,* I tried to trace the relation between social hierarchy and mystery, or guilt. And I carried such speculations further in my *Rhetoric of Religion.* Here we encounter secular analogues of "original sin." For, despite any cult of good manners and humility, to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated, with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are the conditions for a kind of "built in" pride. King and peasant are "mysteries" to each other. Those "Up" are guilty of not being "Down," those "Down" are certainly guilty of not being "Up."

Here man's skill with symbols combines with his negativity and with the tendencies towards different modes of livelihood implicit in the inventions that make for division of labor, the result being definitions and differentiations and allocations of property protected by the negativities of the law. I particularly like E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India,* for its ingenious ways of showing how social mystery can become interwoven with ideas of cosmic mystery. The grotesque fictions of Franz Kafka are marvelous in this regard. The use of the word "Lord," to designate sometimes the Deity sometimes an aristocrat, in itself indicates the shift between the two kinds of "worship." In *Book of the Courtier* Castiglione brings out the relationship nicely when he writes of kneeling on one knee to the sovereign, on both knees to God. Or, in ancient Rome, the application of the term *pontifex maximus* to the Emperor specifically recognized his "bridging" relationship as both a god and the head of the social hierarchy. Milton's use of terms such as Cherubim, Seraphim, Thrones, Dominations, Powers, reflects the conceiving of supernatural relations after the analogy of a social ladder. The religious vision of the city on a hill is similarly infused—making in all a ziggurat-like structure without skyscrapers. (Recall a related image, El Greco's painting of Toledo.) And, of course, the principles of such hierarchal order are worked out with imaginative and intellectual fullness in Dante's *Divine Comedy.* The mediaeval pageant probably represents the perfection of this design. All the various "mysteries" were represented, each distinct from all the others, yet all parts of the same over-arching order.

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VI

By now we should also have taken care of such definitions as man the "political animal" or the "culture-bearing animal." And for a while, I felt that these clauses sufficiently covered the ground. However, for reasons yet to be explained, I decided that a final codicil was still needed, thus making in all:

Man is

the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal

inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)

separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making

goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)

and rotten with perfection.

I must hurry to explain and justify this wry codicil.

The principle of perfection is central to the nature of language as motive. The mere desire to name something by its "proper" name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways is intrinsically "perfectionist." What is more "perfectionist" in essence than the impulse, when one is in dire need of something, to so state this need that one in effect "defines" the situation? And even a poet who works out cunning ways of distorting language does so with perfectionist principles in mind, though his ideas of improvement involve recondite stylistic twists that may not disclose their true nature as judged by less perverse tests.

Thoughts on this subject induce us to attempt adapting, for sheerly logological purposes, the Aristotelian concept of the "entelechy," the notion that each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind (or, etymologically, is marked by a "possession of telos within"). The stone would be all that is needed to make it a stone; the tree would be all that is needed to make it a tree; and man would (or should!) be all that is needed to make him the perfectly "rational" being (presumably a harder entelechial job to accomplish than lower kinds of entities confront). Our point is: Whereas Aristotle seems to have thought of all beings in terms of

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the entelechy (in keeping with the ambiguities of his term, *kinesis,* which includes something of both "action" and "motion"), we are confining our use of the principle to the realm of symbolic action. And in keeping with this view, we would state merely: There is a principle of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol-systems; and in keeping with his nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle.

At this point we must pause to answer an objection. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (near the end of Chapter V) Freud explicitly calls upon us "to abandon our belief that in man there dwells an impulse towards perfection, which has brought him to his present heights of intellectual prowess and sublimation." Yet a few sentences later in that same closing paragraph, we find him saying, "The repressive instinct never ceases to strive after its complete satisfaction." But are not these two sentences mutually contradictory? For what could more clearly represent an "impulse to perfection" than a "striving" after "complete satisfaction"?

The alternative that Freud proposes to the striving after perfection is what he calls a "repetition compulsion." And near the end of Chapter III he has described it thus:

> One knows people with whom every human relationship ends in the same way: benefactors whose protégés, however different they may otherwise have been, invariably after a time desert them in ill-will, so that they are apparently condemned to drain to the dregs all the bitterness of ingratitude; men with whom every friendship ends in the friend's treachery; others who indefinitely often in their lives invest some other person with authority either in their own eyes or generally, and themselves overthrow such authority after a given time, only to replace it by a new one; lovers whose tender relationships with women each and all run through the same phases and come to the same end, and so on. We are less astonished at this "endless repetition of the same" if there is involved a question of active behaviour on the part of the person concerned, and if we detect in his character an unalterable trait which must always manifest itself in the repetition of identical experiences. Far more striking are those cases where the person seems to be experiencing something passively, without exerting any influence of his own, and yet always meets with the same fate over and over again.

Freud next mentions in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* the story of the hero Tancred who, having unwittingly slain his beloved Clorinda, later in an enchanted wood hews down a tall tree

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with his sword, and when blood streams from the gash in the tree, he hears the voice of Clorinda whose soul was imprisoned in the tree, and who reproaches him for having again "wrought" the same "baleful deed."

Freud sees in all such instances the workings of what he calls the neurotic attempt to so shape one's later life that some earlier unresolved problem is lived over and over again. Freud also calls it a "destiny compulsion," to bring out the thought that the sufferer unconsciously strives to form his destiny in accordance with this earlier pattern.

My point is: Why should such a "destiny compulsion" or "repetition compulsion" be viewed as antithetical to the "principle of perfection"? Is not the sufferer exerting almost superhuman efforts in the attempt to give his life a certain *form,* to so shape his relations to people in later years that they will conform perfectly to an emotional or psychological pattern already established in some earlier formative situation? What more thorough illustrations could one want, of a drive to make one's life "perfect," despite the fact that such efforts at perfection might cause the unconscious striver great suffering?

To get the point, we need simply widen the concept of perfection to the point where we can also use the term *ironically,* as when we speak of a "perfect fool" or a "perfect villain." And, of course, I had precisely such possibilities in mind when in my codicil I refer to man as being "rotten" with perfection.

The ironic aspect of the principle is itself revealed most perfectly in our tendency to conceive of a "perfect" enemy. (See on " 'Perfection' as a Motive," in *Permanence and Change,* Hermes edition, pp. 292-294.) The Nazi version of the Jew, as developed in Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* is the most thorough-going instance of such ironic "perfection" in recent times, though strongly similar trends keep manifesting themselves in current controversies between "East" and "West." I suppose the most "perfect" definition of man along these lines is the formula derived from Plautus: *homo homini lupus,* or one to suit the sort of imaginary herding animal that would fit Hobbes's notion of the *bellum omnium contra omnes.*

The principle of perfection in this dangerous sense derives sustenance from other primary aspects of symbolicity. Thus, the

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principle of drama is implicit in the idea of action, and the principle of victimage is implicit in the nature of drama. The negative helps radically to define the elements to be victimized. And inasmuch as substitution is a prime resource of symbol-systems, the conditions are set for catharsis by scapegoat (including the "natural" invitation to "project" upon the enemy any troublesome traits of our own that we would negate). And the unresolved problems of "pride" that are intrinsic to privilege also bring the motive of hierarchy to bear here; for many kinds of guilt, resentment, and fear tend to cluster about the hierarchal psychosis, with its corresponding search for a sacrificial principle such as can become embodied in a political scapegoat.

Similar ominous invitations along these lines derive from the terministic fact that, as Aristotle observes in his Rhetoric, antithesis is an exceptionally effective rhetorical device. There is its sheerly *formal* lure, in giving dramatic saliency and at least apparent clarity to any issue. One may find himself hard put to define a policy purely in its own terms, but one can advocate it persuasively by an urgent assurance that it is decidedly *against* such-and-such other policy with which people may be disgruntled. For this reason also, the use of antithesis helps deflect embarrassing criticism (as when rulers silence domestic controversy by turning public attention to animosity against some some foreign country's policies). And in this way, of course, antithesis helps reinforce unification by scapegoat.

The principle of perfection (the "entelechial" principle) figures in other notable ways as regards the genius of symbolism. A given terminology contains various *implications,* and there is a corresponding "perfectionist" tendency for men to attempt carrying out those implications. Thus, each of our scientific nomenclatures suggests its own special range of possible developments, with specialists vowed to carry out these terministic possibilities to the extent of their personal ability and technical resources. Each such specialty is like the situation of an author who has an idea for a novel, and who will never rest until he has completely embodied it in a book. Insofar as any of these terminologies happen also to contain the risks of destroying the world, that's just too bad; but the fact remains that, so far as the sheer principles of the investigation are concerned, they are no different from those of the writer

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who strives to complete his novel. There is a kind of "terministic compulsion" to carry out the implications of one's terminology, quite as, if an astronomer discovered by his observations and computations that a certain wandering body was likely to hit the earth and destroy us, he would nonetheless feel compelled to *argue for the correctness of his computations,* despite the ominousness of the outcome. Similarly, of course, men will so draw out the implications of their terminologies that new expectations are aroused (promises that are now largely interwoven with the state of Big Technology, and that may prove to be true or false, but that can have revolutionary effects upon persons who agree with such terministic "extrapolations").

Whereas there seems to be no principle of control intrinsic to the ideal of carrying out any such set of possibilities to its "perfect" conclusion, and whereas all sorts of people are variously goaded to track down their particular sets of terministically directed insights, there is at least the fact that the schemes get in one another's way, thus being to some extent checked by rivalry with one another. And such is especially the case where *allocation of funds* is concerned.

To round out the subject of "perfection," in both honorific and ironic senses, we might end by observing that, without regard for the ontological truth or falsity of the case, there are sheerly technical reasons, intrinsic to the nature of language, for belief in God and the Devil. Insofar as language is intrinsically hortatory (a medium by which men can obtain the cooperation of one another), God perfectly embodies the petition. Similarly, insofar as vituperation is a "natural" resource of speech, the Devil provides a perfect butt for invective. Heaven and Hell together provide the ultimate, or perfect, grounding for sanctions. God is also the perfect audience for praise and lamentation (two other primary modes of symbolic action, with lamentation perhaps the "first" of all, as regards tests of biological priority). Such considerations would provide a strictly logological treatment of Martin Buber's "I-Thou Relation."

VII

So much for the clauses of our Definition, a definition which most people would probably want to characterize as "descriptive"

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rather than "normative," yet which is surely normative in the sense that its implications are strongly admonitory, suggesting the kind of foibles and crotchets which a "comic" theory of education[2] would feature, in asking man to center his attention on the understanding of his "natural temptations" towards kinds of turbulence that, when reinforced with the powers of the new weapons, threaten to undo us.

I'm not too sure that, in the present state of Big Technology's confusions, any educational policy, even if it were itself perfect and were adopted throughout the world, would be able to help much, when the world is so ardently beset by so much distress and malice. The dreary likelihood is that, if we do avoid the holocaust, we shall do so mainly by bits of political patch-work here and there, with alliances falling sufficiently on the bias across one another, and thus getting sufficiently in one another's road, so that there's not enough "symmetrical perfection" among the contestants to set up the "right" alignment and touch it off.

Perhaps because of my special liking for the sympathetically ironic point of view in E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India,* I place a wan hope in the sheer muddle of current international relations. That is, there is the chance that the problem, in its very insolubility, also contains enough elements of self-cancellation to keep things from coming to a perfect fulfillment in a perfect Apocalyptic holocaust. Meanwhile, the most that one can do, when speculating on a definition, is to ask oneself whether it is turned somewhat in the right direction.

But what of an ending for this discussion? After so much talk about "perfection," I feel quite self-conscious. For obviously, my discussion should itself have a perfect ending.

A perfect ending should promise something. In this regard, I guess the most perfect ending is provided by a sermon in which, after a threat of total loss unless we mend our ways, we are promised the hope of total salvation if we do mend our ways. But

[2] In his *Parts of Animals,* Chapter X, Aristotle mentions the definition of man as the "laughing animal," but he does not consider it adequate. Though I would hasten to agree, I obviously have a big investment in it, owing to my conviction that mankind's only hope is a cult of comedy. (The cult of tragedy is too eager to help out with the holocaust. And in the last analysis, it is too pretentious to allow for the proper recognition of our animality.) Also, I'd file "risibility" under "symbolicity." Insofar as man's laughter is to be distinguished from that of the Hyena, the difference derives from ideas of *incongruity* that are in turn derived from principles of *congruity* necessarily implicit in any given symbol-system.

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even though, today, we stand as close as mankind ever has stood, in secular regards, to a choice precisely as radical as that, I can build up no such perfectly urgent pattern (partly because, as we generally recognize now, it is impossible for us truly to imagine that next day, no matter how earnestly some writers try to help us by inventing imaginary accounts of it, accounts which even they can't believe, despite the enterprise of their imaginings).

The best I can do is state my belief that things might be improved somewhat if enough people began thinking along the lines of this definition; my belief that, if such an approach could be perfected by many kinds of critics and educators and self-admonishers in general, things might be a little less ominous than otherwise.

However, at this point I hit upon a kind of *Ersatz* promise for an ending. As you will see, it is concerned with perfection on a grand scale. And it has in its favor the further fact that it involves the modernizing, or perfecting, of a traditional vision, one even so primal as to be expressed in a nursery jingle. I shall give the traditional jingle first, and then my proposed modernized perfecting of it. The older form ran thus:

If all the trees were one tree
What a great tree that would be.

If all the axes were one axe
What a great axe that would be.

If all the men were one man
What a great man he would be.

And if all the seas were one sea
What a great sea that would be.

And if the great man
Took the great axe
And chopped down the great tree
And let it fall into the great sea

What a Splish-Splash that would be!

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Modernized, perfected, the form runs thus:

If all the thermo-nuclear warheads
Were one thermo-nuclear warhead
What a great thermo-nuclear warhead that would be.

If all the intercontinental ballistic missiles
Were one intercontinental ballistic missile
What a great intercontinental ballistic missile that would be.

If all the military men
Were one military man
What a great military man he would be.

And if all the land masses
Were one land mass
What a great land mass that would be.

And if the great military man
Took the great thermo-nuclear warhead
And put it into the great intercontinental ballistic missile
And dropped it on the great land mass,

What great PROGRESS that would be!

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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

The Art

In spring looking at a
piece
of abstract art

call it anything
a
crocus clump

a new laid breast just
hatched
by Modigliani

Greeting for Old Age

Advance and take your place:
how do you do?
I salute you along with your half blind

sister whom I know intimately
related by your cryptic smile.

I saw you approaching from
across the street
welcoming me making me feel my age

older than we would care to acknowledge
or you should admit
the sophistry of it.

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Still Lifes

All poems can be represented by
still lifes not to say
water-colors, the violence of
the Iliad lends itself to an arrangement
of narcissi in a jar,
The slaughter of Hector by Achilles
can well be shown by them
casually assembled yellow upon white
radiantly making a circle
sword strokes violently given
in more or less haphazard disarray

Trala Trala Trala La-Le-La

When the time has arrived
for your birthday
which I celebrate not with dancing
but a measured tread

we must join hands
what else can we do?
create a measure ignoring
what we had to do

when we were young at
a celebration—let's
eat our cake and have
it too dancingly

as we may flinging
our feet upward and out
to the end of time trala
trala trala la-le-la

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VERNON WATKINS

Orbits

1. The Colosseum and the Outer Spaces

The Colosseum and the outer spaces are one:
The barter of heaven is done.

Rome's ruined doorways and temples overgrown
Speak to the heart through stone.
Bodies of marble speak; forms of Praxiteles
Breathe. In the Vatican these
Arrest the beholder. After long sojourn in earth
They display an earlier birth.
Who wholly returns their scrutiny, far, yet near
In time? But the martyrs here,
All memory now of sacrifice effaced
In the city long laid waste,
Killed in the Colosseum, with scorn for wreath:
What part have these in the stones' continued resting?
They have purchased heaven through the bonds of their own attesting:
It is theirs, the air we breathe.

The Colosseum and the outer spaces are one:
The barter of heaven is done.

Races perish, languages die. Yet in this
Place, belief and death kiss.
Still valid in the articulation of dust,
Justice reclaims the just.
They made their choice, and above them, all is majestic,
All in movement, drastic.
Within the gigantic walls boulders like dice
Fall, and the foot falls twice,
Walking, and is challenged at every step
By walls that talk in their sleep.
Consider the tongue of heaven, and stop, where stood
Attentive souls, nor lose, faint echoing, the last

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Who willing ran to join them, Saint Additus, cast
To be lions' prey and food.

The Colosseum and the outer spaces are one:
The barter of heaven is done.

At the heart of the Colosseum lives overthrown
Bear witness always in stone.
The air is strewn with bonds, with the strings of breath
Muted in dust and death;
For the dead are near you, and their quarrel is shared
In this place where none is spared.
Your very steps are prescribed like the steps of a dancer,
And at each a voice makes answer:
'Seek no further. I was myself here led
Inward to die, my dead
Near me. We chose to die here, by Tiber's flood,
Nor stayed captive; for joy, that sacred leaper,
Poured, like a fountain, light in the eyes of the sleeper,
In the issue of faith and blood.'

The Colosseum and the outer spaces are one:
The barter of heaven is done.

2. The Revolution of the Heart

Is there a heart in space? Is heaven's wide span
Kindly disposed to man,
Massing new satellites on the dynamic slope
Of his far-travelling hope,
Who sees their return, like planets, vouchsafed by
Orbits in star-sown sky?
This that encircles the Earth, that is his own
Workmanship, returning when it has flown
Through fabulous space, what is it but a dart
Seeking always the orbit of his own heart?
Though pushed by an impulse beyond this atmosphere
Whose heat and pressure might make it disappear,
Re-entering this, it dives, that travelling done,
And drops on water its outcast prodigal son.

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Orbits: the spiral marking of shell or urn
Speaks of the heart's return.

Yet thought is pitched by the dignity of a shroud
Beyond orbit or cloud,
And still the most distantly exiled heart must come
Back to this centre in Rome,
Making the circle of stones with prophecy scream,
Struck by its echoing beam.
In the night of the catacombs these the chariot forgets,
On whose inmost, intricate circles no sun sets,
Who evokes them now, laid where the violet blooms,
Propitiating the dark in nameless tombs?
Come closer. Cast doubt's garment. Do you suppose
That over their eyes oblivion's flood can close?
These are the atoms of that most travelled thing,
And the simultaneous light of the angel's wing.

Orbits: the spiral marking of shell or urn
Speaks of the heart's return.

At the heart of the Colosseum reared by man
This wheel of stones began
Its endless whirling. A voice inhabits the air,
Separated from prayer
By contrary mass, the momentous opposite
Of the taper's stillness, lit
In catacomb darkness. However distant it fly,
That outer circle itself must magnify
This inmost loss. What may the wandering mind
Of true substance in outer darkness find?
In Christ is the orbit of love. Where a candle throws
Light on woman or man, or a babe's repose,
True man re-enters his path, where monuments quiver,
Back through his ancient bonds, for bonds to deliver.

Orbits: the secret marking of shell or urn
Speaks of the heart's return.

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JACK MARSHALL

The Sailor

That old Islamic moon saber-tooths
the window of the Sun hotel, where my ducks fell
with your skirt like two misfits near the bath . . .
and spins an odor straight from hell.
Or is it the sea's and your body gleaming
like a fish, myself no less a jellied thing
with gills and reek of kippers in a crestfallen room
where your neck tastes warm as the beer
I drank in the White Rose, watching, as you cruised
hazily to hand, a blue moon swivel on the stool.
The ruse
clinked with the touching of our glasses;
between the rounds of a TV bout
our talk melted with the ice tinkling down the bar—

"The steward likes it in the meat-freezer,
. . . 'cools the heart' he says". . . .
"Mine is a lump of salt," you said,
"and who or what laps it, God only knows."

The moon's ankle-bracelet bandied with my eye,
and your highheels flashed with stars!
On a disk of smoke, web-slow, wound a blind negro's song . . .

"Lonely rivers flow to the sea,
Lonely rivers sigh wait for me, wait for me . . .
I'll be coming home, wait for me."

I'd have you at any price!

* * *

Like Bluebeard and his bird we swashed
and staggered down the plank of mobbing eyes,
outside The Flaming Embers watched the chefs—
bored

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court-jesters in tall chef hats—spear
and sweat and flip black steaks along the grill;
then, drop by drop, I saw my blood
an offering in the pan;
I made a face. But fire licked it off the glass.

Streetlights winked a red eye for you, one for me;
to your bidding eye, a marquee featured cock-fights;
spectra pocked your face!
By a newsstand, an old chestnut vendor haunted the air
with jungle smells,
and an abscess spread in the night's deep mouth . . .

FIRE SALE!****AUCTION!****MAGAZINES FOR
DOCTORS ONLY!

You can see them anytime, myopic, anonymous,
lizard-hunched as they finger the girlie monthlies
with a desperate craze.

We signed the register as man and wife;
the nightclerk grinned our forgery to life.

* * *

Outside the windowsill, blowzy lightbulbs
shimmy a blue and red burlesque. A mouse scratches by
on snaredrum feet.
Your hair, black jungles, your penny breasts
shadow me with Africa.
I'm seasick in your thighs!
We're out, out in deepest water; the dark room's buckling
at my knees. I keel full speed ahead
through the harbor's dumpage—my own wake, a fin!
Bitch, your belly's gulped me in almost.
But yet I fear the sea—it's unpeopled.

I have seen myself cast up on a distant shore
and lust, like a mammonth, rise
from the fossil floor.

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Letter to My Father on the Other Side

(Paris, 1962)

Your nights draw nearer
as your face drifts away.
Though now the Atlantic Ocean stands
between us like frosted glass,
you were never closer . . .
not even when you approached
to offer me your failing business.

Success! . . . You tried,
but lacked the know-how.
Like a kept woman,
thankless, mean, insatiable,
it ate away your life
and what it left was not enough
to meet the sumptuous needs
extorted by the age.

It wasn't long before the squeeze
showed in your shuffle . . .
yet you stayed.
Watching you thin so,
I couldn't help quarreling
and soon left.
Yesterday, passing a dry-goods window
on the Rue St. Jacques,
with stockings much too long
for its plaster foot display
(toeless, just like yours),
brought it back to me:

the dim shop
on the ghost-town's edge,
its cramped window dizzy
with Arabic-tipped lettering

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(signs you stayed up nights
penning like a scribe)
and you, less lord than janitor,
absently dusting the stacks
of never-diminishing towels,
waiting for the rush.
Instead, stray bargain hunters
came now and then, blinking
like rats;
having no one else, you stayed.

Holding out is everything.
Early today I went back
to see what more I could recognize.
Standing there before the window,
I saw a face, peeled and shopworn
from being too long under the hot lamps,
peer back at me.
Seeing it made me want to write
you after these many years.
Have you taken a room in town yet,
or do you still lay a blanket out
beneath the counter every night?

New Year's Eve, 1961

My young son lies upstairs
in fever. Soon the doctor
will tiptoe down and, softening
her hard Breton features
(she is kind, having left her party
and driven from Vincennes)
will smile and accept another drawing.
This Christmas
I sent her a sketch dated 1934.
She understands and,
in an emergency,
will be back.

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They were all done
at Collegio Ciudad before
the droning Stukas tested
their new bombsights on Barcelona
and everyone, at first,
turned out to watch the bombs
crack like eggs on the Ramblas—
muffled plopping sounds;
that day the flower-stalls
were redder than their roses.
Later there were signs:
"Make Tanks."

Outside my window
mist clogs the streetlamps,
peels a Bardot poster
off a mould-green wall
and thins a police van's wail
lurching hysterically toward Odeon.
Far off, it gloves
the clank of solid wood
on skull or pavement—a sound
bowling ball and pin make
on contact. I hear it a second
time, Rodrigo. So will you.

All around, my humped sculptures
hedge me in. Bronze once,
each grows muddier, each year
muddier like the Seine.
When did I lose touch
with the acetylene that hummed
like a bird in my palm, burning
its way into cool metal?
All I see now is the sun, bleary
as the Rembrandt
I go to often in the Louvre,
puff-lipped, bulb-nosed, bloodshot,
after a bad night, shabbily rising.

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Relapse

It's getting late;
The dark around him,
An ultimatum running out
Like the skyline's cardiogram.

Central Park. From here he sees headlights spear
The latebirds all the way downtown—this one
To his pet viciousness, that one to his fear—
And beam the Empire, the straightest rocket in town.

Up there, behind the project's ice-tray
Windows, air conditioners glut
Themselves on May perspiration, then spray
Back pure menthol. Minds, pores shut.

Drowsily, each waits in his bed
For the season's heatwaves to vaporize red
Brick and glass, then swell him up like yeast
For death, the polyphagiast.

Obsession threads him like a needle's eye.
From a cloud too full, too tense
To shower easily, some of his certainties
Strike the sidewalk and hiss.

In his mind is a window: her leap, a quick
Filing drawn to the positive,
Gives in to its magnet and sticks.
Others try addiction, war, madness for sedative;

Even God curled in his egg keeps
For himself a page from Satan's book,
Rings his crooning angels, and sleeps
Through livestock moving throat to throat, singed hair, a row
of hooks.

Under a black photographer's hood
His memory tries to focus . . . a smile, pink lips
Shaping a kiss . . . But it's no good,
It's nausea, that green chatterer again, shaking off its sleep.

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The Way Back

Those white-hot ports drifting
through flour, baking like bread
in the sun, that ship—
I have been thinking about its hull,
sun-slick between Azores and Lagos,
the hold drumming
with the absolute, impossible cargo
that would not see the light;
the crude lyre I was given—
a rum crate, four saw blades over slots
my fingers cut themselves on
they plucked so hard—
that too left behind.

These days, living near the odor
but not the sight, I walk
up Whitehall Street toward the river, where it ended,
keeping an eye for a slim white prow above the harbor
sheds.
Part of me, having said it
once, and badly,
knows we have nothing more to say to each other.
Knows this, turning

Gypsy Procession

Ste. Marie de la Mer

Heat waves bear down and billow the stucco walls off Côte
d'Azur.
From here, the holy procession to the sea. But first,
in the shade of steaming urinals, begins the dancing:
from Provence, Lorraine and Aragon they come,
red and yellow skirts of prostitute and virgin—semaphores
flapping to the polished scuffle of guitars. Fishmouth
earrings, spit-curls, spots on a peacock, fan out;
and the beach, a great coarse sponge, soaks in
the aphrodisiac air. As smoke from a wall of candles

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pours out the cathedral door, a paunched, deific baritone booms
"Viva Santa Maria" through a public address. In black,
the widows ululate, the blind and crippled take up miraculous
rosaries to hawk. And then the bells,
the riders on horseback parting the crowd. Between them,
a wooden doll, its face neither male nor female, but dark,
bloodied and dark as an African mask, crowned, brocade
caressing its shoulders. As the crowd edges to the sea,
the horses prance in with the doll, its bleared, benevolent smile
granting another year's largesse of jalopies for the men,
and the women, greased, prophetic palms.

For Kathleen, Gone on a Brief Journey

This, our first night apart,
the rain that falls
always without warning
on the seven deaf bridges of Paris
tossing beggars along like handbills
tonight spatters my shadow
with blue grease
'til it runs, hatless, into the gutter.

All I can think of is
your comfort
my unkind words
your quick eyes
taking in a strange landscape,
how in two days
they'll flash evergreen
as you tell me what you saw:

loose among the dark pines of Alsace
a golden bird, its long wings
beating for joy,
no man had seen or believed in
for a thousand years.

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WILLIAM MEREDITH

The Wreck of the Thresher

(lost at sea April 10, 1963)

I stand on the ledge where rock runs into the river
As the night turns brackish with morning, and mourn the drowned.
Here the sea is diluted with river; I watch it slaver
Like a dog curing of rabies. Its ravening over,
Lickspittle ocean nuzzles the dry ground.
(But the dream that woke me was worse than the sea's gray
Slip-slap; there are no such sounds by day.)

This crushing of people is something we live with.
Daily, by unfathomable whim
Or caught up in some hare-brained scheme of Death,
Tangled in cars, dropped from the air, in flame,
Men and women break the pledge of breath:
And now under water, gone all jetsam and small
In the pressure of oceans collected, a squad of brave men in a hull.

(Why won't our dreams be content with the terrible facts?
The only animal cursed with responsible sleep,
We trace disaster always to our own acts.
I met a monstrous self trapped in the black deep:
All these years, he smiled, *I've drilled at sea*
For this crush of water. Then he saved only me;
Or was it sabotage by some vast selfishness
Of mine caused all that endless torrent of distress?)

We invest ships with life. Look at a harbor
At first light: with better grace than men
In their movements the vessels run to their labors
Working the fields that the tide has made green again;
Their beauty is womanly, they are named for ladies and queens,

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Although by a wise superstition these are called
After fish, the finned boats, silent and submarine.
The crushing of any ship has always been held
In dread, like a house burned or a great tree felled.

I think of how sailors laugh, as if cold and wet
And dark and lost were their private, funny derision
And I can judge then what dark compression
Astonishes them now, their sunken faces set
Unsmiling, where the currents sluice to and fro
And without humor, somewhere northeast of here and below.

(Sea-brothers, I lower you the ingenuity of dreams,
Strange lungs and bells to escape in; let me stay aboard last—
We amend our dreams in half-sleep. Then it seems
Easy to talk to the severe dead and explain the past.
Now they are saying, *Do not be ashamed to stay alive,*
You have dreamt nothing that we do not forgive.
And gentlier, *Study something deeper than yourselves,*
As, how the heart, when it turns diver, delves and saves.)

Whether we give assent to shipwreck, or rage
Is a question of temperament and does not matter.
Some will has been done past our understanding,
Past our guilt surely, equal to our fears.
Dullards, we are set again to the cryptic blank page
Where the sea schools us with terrible water.
The noise of a boat breaking up and its men is in our ears.
The bottom here is too far down for our sounding;
The ocean was salt before we crawled to tears.

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Twilight

translated from Guillaume Apollinaire

Grazed by the shadows that pass,
Columbine naked and cool
While the day expires on the grass
Studies herself in the pool.

A crepuscular charlatan
Barks the wonders to come;
The innocent sky is filled
With stars the color of milk.

The pale harlequin on the stage
Now salutes his spectators—
Some elves, a Bohemian mage,
Fairies, prestidigitators.

Then he unfastens a star,
His arms work a juggler's feat
While a hanged man rolls a fanfare
On the cymbals with his feet.

The blindwoman shuts her son's eyes,
The deer slide by in the mist,
The dwarf marks sadly the rise
Of Harlequin Trismegist.

The Ballet

In a cage of light, the splendid creatures
With faces amenable to anything,
Doing whatever you like—fountains
Of work, cascades of pretty failure.
With flanks as clean as bone they signal one another
On the far side of a trench of music—
Such young breasts and hair, such bold genitals

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Until you would think we were the caged ones
Where our bodies shift and mumble
In the dark-tunnelled house
Waiting for feeding-time and after that, sleep.
We watch the loping things from the zoo of ourselves.

Yet it is not only their perfection detains
Us in the paunchy dark, it is pity too.
That they must signal so, like eloquent mutes?
Yes, that, and a longer affliction of splendor:
That it cannot reproduce its kind.

The Couple Overhead

They don't get anywhere,
The couple overhead;
They wrangle like the damned
In the bed above my bed,
But the harm has all been done.
And this is a short despair:
Count Ugolino dead
Was endlessly condemned
To gnaw the archbishop's head
Where the nape and the skull are one.

Not so, these secular drunks.
Dante would find their treason
Too spiritless to keep;
Like children stealing raisins
They eat each other's eyes.
The ice that grips their flanks
Is something they have frozen.
After a while they sleep;
And the punishment they've chosen,
After a while it dies.

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GALWAY KINNELL

Room of Return

Room over the Hudson
Where a naked light bulb
Lights some coathangers, whiskey bottles,
Umbrellas, socks, poems, shoes,
A potted plant trimmed like the crucifixion,

From which, out the front window,
You sometimes can see
The *Vulcania* or the *France*
Or a fat *Queen*
Steaming through the buildings across the street,

To which every night
An alley-cat sneaks up
To slop a saucer
Of fresh milk on the fire escape
Washing down his rat,

Room crossed by breezes
Out of air conditioners' back ends,
By the clicking at all hours of invisible looms,
By the shouts in the night-market, motors, horns,
By bleats of boats wandering the Hudson,

Room, anyway,
Where I switch the light on
After an absence of years,
Tiny glimmer again in the city
Pricking the sky, shelled by the dirty sea.

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Poem of Night

1

I touch your face,
I move my hand over
Slopes, falls, lumps of sight,
Lashes barely able to be touched,
Lips that give way so easily
It's a shock to feel underneath
The steady smile of the bones,

Muffled slightly, cloaked,
Zygoma, maxillary, turbinate.

2

I put my hand
On the side of your face,
You lean your head a little
Into my hand—and so,
I know you're a dormouse
Taken up in winter sleep,
A lonely, stunned weight
Closed in the natural mystery.

3

A cheekbone,
A curved piece of brow,
A pale eyelid
Float in the dark—
And now I make out
An eye, dark,
Wormed with far-off, unaccountable lights.

4

I put an arm across you,
Hardly touching, and I hold
What I can only think of as
Some deepest of memories in my arms,

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Not mine, but as if the life in me
Were slowly remembering what it is.

You lie here now in your physicalness,
This beautiful degree of reality.

5

And now the day, raft that breaks up, comes on.
I think of a few bones
Floating on a river at night—
The starlight blowing in place on the water,
The river leaning like a wave towards the emptiness.

Hardscrabble Mountain

1

I lay on the mountain
On old slashed spruce boughs
Buoying me up off the snow,

Now and then a bit of snow
Would slide quietly from a branch,
Once a deer-fly came by . . .

I could see off for about a hundred miles—

2

I waked with a start,
The sun had crawled off me,
I shivered in thick blue shadow,
Sap stuck me to the spruce boughs.

Far away I could hear
A high wind starting to rise.

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3

I came down the mountain—
Passing the little graveyard in the woods
I gave a thought to the old skulls and bones lying there—

And I prayed to a black bear just shutting his eyes,
To a dozing least weasel,
To a marmot with yellow belly,
To a dog-faced hedgehog,
To a dormouse with a paunch and large ears like leaves
or wings.

A Bird Comes Back

1

Only the head and shoulders, only
The bust of a bird really,
Cochineal and emerald appears,
Stinging the blossoms, there,
At the open window, amidst phlox,
Where there are, already,
Bees and three white butterflies,
His missing wings crackling deeply
As he needles the flowers.

2

The old timbers of the house
Shift sidewise, like stove-grates,
One of the too-frequent settlings,
Think of Emily Dickinson's hummingbird—

3

Strange to see him now
With nothing in back of him but New Hampshire
Fifty miles away and badly faded.

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Harbor Darkness

A gull crazy for darkness
Skims the slapping waves
Belly always aglow
Over troughs in which float
Old bits of Upstate light—
Lamps doused in Shaghticoke,
Headlights killed in the Niskayuna bushes,
Glints off Coxsackie dental plates,
Gleam of Mechanicville tears—
And shall skim the whole sea
And arrive at dawn shining in advance.

JAMES WRIGHT

Youth

Strange bird,
His song remains secret.
He worked too hard to read books.
He never heard how Sherwood Anderson
Got out of it, and fled to Chicago, furious to free himself
From his hatred of factories.
My father toiled fifty years
At Hazel-Atlas Glass,
Caught among girders that smash the kneecaps
Of dumb honyaks.
Did he shudder with hatred in the cold shadow of grease?
Maybe. But my brother and I do know
He came home as quiet as the evening.

He will be getting dark, soon,
And loom through new snow.

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I know his ghost will drift home
To the Ohio River, and sit down, alone,
Whittling a root.
He will say nothing.
The waters flow past, older, younger
Than he is, or I am.

In the March Wind

In the March wind,
The farmer's shoulders loom up alone in a wide field,
Unsure as damp wings.
He tends the fresh silence.
His siloes are lonely winters.
Along the ditch,
At the edge of his sleeping soil,
A crow limps
In the wet snow,
Searching for the beginnings
Of dark water.

The Frontier

The man on the radio mourns
That another endless American winter
Daybreak is beginning to fall
On Idaho, on the mountains.

How many scrawny children
Lie dead and only half hidden among frozen ruts
In my body, along my dark roads.
Lean coyotes meet among clouds
On mountain trails, and smile,
And pass on, in snow.

A girl stands in a doorway.
Her arms are bare to the elbows,

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Her face gray, and she stares coldly
At the day break.
When the howl goes up, her eyes
Flare white, like a mare's.
It was not worth it.

Hobo

I turned off the alarm clock.
I strolled down the cinder path
By the railroad.

Soon,
The magnificent black locomotives
Of death
Loomed over both shoulders.

So I closed my eyes,
I stopped breathing.
Then I stepped down
Through the wet weeds.
I came to the edge
Of the water,
The white sand.

Far off,
Among the pines of the other shore,
I saw a tall blond girl,
Poling a boat home slowly.

Her voice played its cold flute over a whole mile of ripples.
Old song,
Rain falling,
Suddenly
I lived forever.

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DENISE LEVERTOV

The Novel

A wind is blowing:
the book being written shifts, halts, pages
yellow and white drawing apart
and inching together in
new tries. A single white half-sheet
skims out under the door.

And cramped in their not yet
halfwritten lives, a man and a woman
grimace in pain. Their cat
yawning its animal secret
stirs in the monstrous limbo of erasure.
They live (when they live) in fear

of blinding, of burning, of choking under a
mushroom cloud in the year of the roach.
And they want (like us) the eternity
of today, they want this fear to be
struck out at once by a thick black
magic marker, everywhere, every page,

the whole sheets of it crushed, crackling,
and tossed in the fire
and when they were fine ashes
the stove would cool and be cleaned
and a jar of flowers would be put to stand
on top of the stove in the spring light.

Meanwhile from page to page they
buy things, acquiring the look of a
full life; they argue, make silence bitter,
plan journeys, move house, implant
despair in each other
and then in the nick of time

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they save one another with tears,
remorse, tenderness—
hooked on those wonder-drugs.
Yet they do have
—don't they—like us—
their days of grace, they

halt, stretch, a vision
breaks in on the cramped grimace,
inscape of transformation.
Something sundered begins to knit.
By scene, by sentence, something is rendered
back into life, back to the gods.

The Novices

They enter the bare wood, drawn
by a clear-obscure summons they fear
and have no choice but to heed.

A rustling underfoot, a
long trail to go, the thornbushes grow
across the dwindling paths.

Until the small clearing, where they
anticipate violence, knowing some rite
to be performed, and compelled to it.

The man moves forward, the boy
sees what he means to do: from an oaktree
a chain runs at an angle into earth

and they pit themselves to uproot it,
dogged and frightened, to pull the iron
out of the earth's heart.

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But from the further depths of the wood
as they strain and weigh on the great chain
appears the spirit

the wood-demon who summoned them.
And he is not bestial, not fierce
but an old woodsman,

gnarled, shabby, smelling of smoke and sweat,
of a bear's height and shambling like a bear.
Yet his presence is a spirit's presence

and awe takes their breath.
Gentle and rough, laughing a little,
he makes his will known:

not for an act of force he called them,
for no rite of obscure violence
but that they might look about them

and see intricate branch and bark,
stars of moss and the old scars
left by dead men's saws,

and not ask what that chain was.
To leave the open fields
and enter the forest,

that was the rite.
Knowing there was mystery, they could go.
Go back now! And he receded

among the multitude of forms,
the twists and shadows they saw now, listening
to the hum of the world's wood.

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WILLIAM STAFFORD

December

Where no one waited a bus comes by
late, the night pasted against the trees
and the circus of limbs politely still
around a lighted telephone booth, where I
exclude the dead world beyond this, my warm coffin.

After my dime is gone, and the last bus,
let no one solicit my gaze, lethal as fact
all my life; I only accept prepaid, random
calls, no demands ever: they strengthen
by battering this door, that thickens in the silence it makes.

This place now contains myself in midnight.
As the trees happen to me, they grow. The bus
took irrelevant things, all that went elsewhere.
Later, my eyes given to the dark, my ears velvet,
I uncreate it all. It unwinds as I walk away.

Explanation

They tell about a train
—nobody at all aboard—
that rolled for the bridge at midnight
and hit all the signals forward
where the Feather River canyon curved
lonesome between tall cliffs
guided by only the rain.

The man who told me—lied:
that empty caboose, those lights
nobody ever tended, or saw,
midnight looming, and the bridge,
and that deep canyon brimmed

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with sound nobody heard—
there wasn't any such ride.

Emphatically, once and for all:
I've explained a hundred times
walking at night with a friend—
how could anyone tell?
And it was a long time ago.
And it wasn't the truth when that train
wound through the dark in the rain.

D. M. PETTINELLA

Translations from Ungaretti

Annihilation

The heart has lavished glowworms
it has kindled and died
from green to green
I have meditated

With my hands I mold the soil
that swarms with crickets
rocking myself
with
meek tempered
heart

She loves me she loves me not
I have enamelled myself
with daisies
and have become rooted
in the tainted earth

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I have grown
as a thorn
on the twisted stalk
catching myself
in the fall of the hawthorn

Today
as the Isonzo
of blue asphalt
I lie
in dust of gravel
uncovered by sun
transmuting
into clouds in flight

In the end
completely free
I am the same fearful being
counting no time with the heartbeats
having no time nor place
but happy

I have on my lips
the kiss of marble

East

The vaporous
rim fades to the distant
circle of sun

Clatter of heels clapping of hands
and the clarinet's shrill doodling
the sea is ashen
unquiet and sweet it trembles
like a pigeon

Emigrants from Soria dance at ship's stern
At bow's end a youth is alone

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On Saturday nights at this hour
the Jews
down below
carry their dead away
in a winding funnel
waverings
of alleys
of lights

Water in turmoil
like the noise on board ship
within shadow
of
sleep

Half Light

Even the graves have disappeared

Endless black space has fallen
from this balcony
to the cemetery

My old Arab friend
who killed himself the other night
came to see me

Once more it is day

The graves return
ambushed between sombre green
of the last darkness
and the hazy green
of dawning light

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MARTHIEL MATHEWS

A Region of Time

> Toutes les régions d'un temps ne vivent pas à la même époque.
>
> —Henri Focillon

I SAW THE OLD HOME ONLY ONCE although I knew it well, it and the land around it. But I saw it only once, from the windows of Rosannah's car on the way to Miss Amy's birthday party. And it was too late.

Rosannah had written Toby, if you will come and drive with me to the birthday party we will go by the Old Home. It was the surest bait for Toby. Every year we planned to go there; buying it back was a recurring dream. But when the time came, Toby couldn't leave his post. The political weather had been stormy enough since the end of the war, and during the spring of that year charges and counter-charges had cracked back and forth over Europe, annunciatory thunder. The saturated air seemed to roil and boil with lies, accusations, threats, hatred. And then it was as if the scattered rumblings had gathered all at once into a dense black thunderhead that could release its energy only in an ultimate catastrophe. Toby's post was in the center of the storm and home leaves were cancelled, even for the cultural affairs people whose reedy notes were seldom if ever heard above the roaring and the pounding and the crashing of the important missions. So I had come on, a long way and alone, bringing the promise that Toby would follow if he could.

To come home to your own country after a long time away . . . all the senses beat the air like antennae, registering the familiar and the changed, the always there but never noticed before. On the plane I had closed my eyes and imagined America. It would be like a warm bath for tired muscles, it had seemed to me. I would be a person, Myself, and not a paradigm to be conjugated and declined. I would know who people are and what they mean; my wide-open eyes would gaze into a sea of eyes as open as my own. There would be those imagined comforts I imagined I missed;

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I was flying toward the easy life. My dream began to tarnish in New York as I struggled with my suitcases onto the train, almost missing it because the last member of the vanished race of porters had himself vanished; and it took a drubbing as I jounced up and down in my berth above a syncopating flat wheel. But the dream persisted. All that night as I rode through the sleeping country I thought, this is my native land flying backward out the window. The lonely light in a farm house was turned on by a hand familiar to me; I knew the odor of the depot waiting-rooms whose dim lights winked in my window and were gone as we hustled through the little towns. Rootless as I was, I needed no guide to this country. It was my own.

I can feel and smell the atmosphere of that time when I see in my memory Rosannah's house standing cool and serene and brownish-white in the late afternoon light of the magnolia trees. If I had felt like a chip off a meteor, a fragment from a disintegrating world when I stepped down from the train into the calm and quiet of the old town, I felt more like a down-at-heel refugee when I stepped through Rosannah's gate, a small hole in a ballooning boxwood hedge, and scattered the gravel of the path in the formal garden, gravel as well combed as a head of hair until I set my feet on it. I was walking in a vision, numbed by the heat and transported by the powerful fragrance of the magnolia and jessamine and funereal box, and by the danger in the outside world whose odor I could still smell in my nostrils, the winter smell of the cold unaired rooms of Europe.

Great waxen blossoms and white doves perched about in the trees, and the very air enveloping the pure Greek temple that was Rosannah's house throbbed with love-making. Here was peace; even the symbol of it was rolling its love against my ears and splashing the gravel with its droppings. I stopped, and looked up in wonder. Then I saw Rosannah, my sister-in-law, in the doorway, watching me: a taut bulky shape framed by two columns, and behind her in the dusky hall the ghostly lumps of furniture in their dust-cover shrouds. I saw her clearly, in detachment, in ideal space, as it were. And what I saw surprised me. Rosannah, growing old, was coming to have a granite, a monolithic look, like a Daughter of the American Revolution. She looked solid, and inert. Yet every particle of that monolith seemed charged, charged

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to a point just this side explosion. It would take only the brush of a feather. . . I called out, with sure instinct, "How beautiful the doves are, Rosannah!"

"Beautiful!" I can still see her ignite, in surprise and fury. "Beautiful! They are ruining my house! They are driving me away! And I won't be able to get a penny for it!"

"Who, Rosannah? *Who*?"

"Why, the doves!"

"The doves?" I could only repeat the words, stupidly.

"They rot my gutters and my rainspouts with their droppings, they dirty my garden, they even splash my head. Their racket is driving me out of my mind. Nobody knows what I've been through with this house!"

"But can't you get rid of them?" I asked—the girl from the golden west.

"Rid of them! They've made a *bird sanctuary* of this town! Nobody cares about beautiful old things, beautiful old houses. I will be forced to sell this house and leave here."

"But Rosannah. . . You've spent your life on your house! How can you leave it? Where would you go?" I babbled as I scrambled for a footing in Rosannah's world. "Why, you've taught here most of your life . . . how can you leave your old friends?"

"Old friends!" she cried. "Nobody cares a thing about me . . . nobody cares if I live or die." Her tears were beginning to gather and thicken her voice. "When you get old you don't care about friends. You want to be near your family."

We spent the evening on indifferent chairs, keeping vigil with the "antiques," the family furniture in its shrouds, while the eternal love making of the doves roucoucoued through the rooms and Rosannah sniffed with the regularity of a leaking faucet. Sniffing short sibilant jerking sniffs, with a toss of her head that made her hair bang against her cheeks. We left Rosannah's house the next morning, bound toward Miss Amy's, my mother-in-law's eightieth birthday party, by way of the Old Home.

I say *left*. . . We leapt, dashed out of the yard in the clutches of a monster. "This is the fastest car I ever had," Rosannah cried, and tears strangled her voice. The car, a whale of tin and chrome with its tailfin high in the air, seemed to surface as it came out from under the green of the yard and the old town—from under

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the water oaks and the magnolias; then it veered, turned, plunged, and surrendered itself to the roaring torrent of the new four-lane highway. Rosannah at the steering wheel clung like a harpooner to his iron, sunk in the very back of leviathan. She was sniffing furiously as she has come to do now that she is getting old, and her flat hat bobbed about as the outrages the world inflicted on her surged under it. "This car is going to kill me!" The tears always just below the surface, like rainwater in an Irish meadow, always ready to flow when she thinks about herself, welled and rolled down her large face. Rosannah accepts no responsibility for the world's outrages, and she is free: free to respond as she pleases, in riposte.

She jerked at the gears as a preparation for slowing down (something you did to save gasoline or the brakes, she couldn't remember which—or was it the tires?), but the new highway rushed on into the stupefying blur of heat, and we rushed with it, sniffing and weeping. Down from the north through the green rolling country, plunging straight into hills, demolishing trees, levelling houses or strewing them about, stranded and irrelevant. Slicing clean through the arabesques of the old meandering roads, churning up a wake of hamburger stands, motor courts, antique shoppes, flying paper.

"There was so much time when we were children!" I have never forgotten Rosannah's tear-strangled cry. When it rings in my ears a lost world looms again, rises like the mirage that shimmered on the pavement that morning in the heat. The hard crust of the new superhighway shatters as the earth shakes itself, sloughing off the bulldozed waste. It humps its back into hill and dale, and the water oaks push up through the concrete. It is another time, not so long ago; it is the country of childhood and another world. And we are not hurtling in a tin whale across a ruined countryside toward Miss Amy's eightieth year. Nor are the other Paget children—the sisters and brothers, half-sisters and half-brothers, rushing along roads with their children toward a family reunion to honor their mother, converging on that small insignificant point toward the southwest of us, that place "at the ends of the earth," "way off down there" where Mr. Percy Paget took Miss Amy to live when he sold his birthright to his brother and moved away.

The fields lie cool and green in the sun. Rosannah, the oldest

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of the children, holds Old George's reins as he ambles up Phillips's Hill, pulling a buggy full of children to school. Paget Road, the old road, is full of the round rumps of horses trotting in front of buggies, surreys; of mule muscles rippling under silken hides to pull the wagons and the cotton to the gin; of angular bony nags clattering along before the rickety rigs. The sounds are the clop-clop of hooves, the sharp-edged wheels crunching the dirt of the road, the singing birds; the smells are wild honeysuckle, the trefoil droppings of the horses, and the red dust. The road ambles along, keeping its distance from the classic temples where the Paget connection lived in their groves, encroaching on nobody, sending out a branch now and then before tending toward the next plantation, the town. A lane wanders off up the hill, past the knoll in the *pasture where the tombstones stand among boxwood and cedar,* through the oak grove an awe-struck Paget left standing when he cleared the land for planting. Past the Old Home with its formal garden laid out in a maze where the peacock spread his fan, past the rows of cedars that once led to the log house that had stood there before the Old Home was built. On to the barns and the stable where Jake the stallion lived like a sultan. And it ends at the "race track," a design on the meadowgrass contained by a one-rail fence where Mr. Percy raced his horses and presided over the barbecue on the Fourth of July.

The world of childhood. . . When I think of that long day's ride with Rosannah I think of that banal and profound figure: life is a journey. We were traveling across the geography of people's lives, across the land the Pagets had shaped and that had shaped them. . . a thicket of memory. It was the only time I ever spent alone with Rosannah and the only time I ever heard her talk about her family and her childhood. But if we were rushing forward in space, we were journeying back and forth, around and around in time. It was then, I think, that the large family I had married into began to dance in my consciousness in strange and baffling figures; that I began to puzzle over what they were and what they had become, to try to fit together what I knew and what I saw.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all! the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan whom thou hast

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made to play therein. Cars bore down on us out of the haze, said *sssssttt* and were gone, anonymous as people passing in a city street. We didn't look at them; they didn't look at us; we were elsewhere, in other times. "There was so much time when we were children!" Rosannah had cried. "If a surrey passed us on the road, we knew who was in it, and they knew us. . ."

As the whale tempered its pace to the monotony of the road, seeming to suit its mood to Rosannah's, she said, sweetly, calmly, in wonder, "For a moment I felt like I did when I was a child. I had the oddest feeling. . ." When I turned to look at her, I saw her eyes. They were beautiful eyes and they were dry.

"My head was clear," she said, "and I had the feeling there was time . . . all the time in the world . . . that a summer was a lifetime and I could do anything I wanted to. That was how it was at the Old Home before Mama died . . . still and calm. We knew everybody. If a surrey passed us on the road, we knew who was in it and they knew us. We had everything, it seemed to me. Why, we were kin to everybody along Paget Road. I'd watch the bugs on the cotton when we drove to town. I could see the bees on the honeysuckle. We'd stop along the way to visit. Cousin Mamie Phillips would send Sugarfoot out with cookies for us children. It was a whole world and it was enough for me.

"Then it all changed. . . I saw Papa crying after Mama died. I was a little girl. The house was full of the kinfolk and I went out to the barn to play with the kittens. They were in a nest of hay, back in a corner . . . their eyes had just opened. They were tumbling and staggering and falling over each other. I thought they were the sweetest things I ever saw. Then Papa came . . . he came where he thought no one would see him. He stopped in the middle of the barn and put his head in his arms. It was terrible, and I've never forgotten it. I've never seen a man cry like that. He loved my mother more than anything in the world, and she was dead." Rosannah paused, stopped by this memory from childhood, and then she said, softly, "You know, seeing Papa cry like that made me want to kill those kittens . . . I hadn't thought of that . . . I'd forgotten it . . . since I was a little girl." Rosannah had stayed quiet until her father was gone, and then she went back to the house by way of Old Mose's forge—something she was afraid to do when Old Mose hopped around like a devil and shook a horseshoe

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at her. But the forge was dark and there was no Old Mose. The world was black. "There was so much time when we were children," she cried again, the tears coming at last. "After Mama died, our life changed, and my head never felt clear like that again."

"Did Aunt Matt come back again to live with you?" I asked her, ". . . to take care of you, then?"

"Aunt Matt? No, thank goodness. . . She had married Uncle Stuart. But after his death she came, for long visits. No . . . Papa sent us to our kin and we lived with them until Papa married again . . . married Miss Amy. Gerald was just born and Grandma Fitzpatrick took him. Aunt Sweet Fitzpatrick took Nora, and spoiled her to death. Uncle Lewis Paget asked for me, and I went to live with him and Aunt Annie in town. Oh, how I longed to live in town!" Rosannah cried. She was always afraid in the country, especially at night when the dark was full of noises and unexplainable life, and she shared her fears with Nora, her sister, and her step-sister, Bo, in a large upstairs bedroom at the Old Home. When they got into their beds the noises would begin. The creaking of the boards in the attic, rustlings from the barnyards and the stables, movements around the negro houses. They would begin by trying to frighten each other and presently all three would be screaming for Papa to come, that Old Mose was climbing up the vines on the lattice to their window, or they could hear the Yankee soldier creaking around that bullet hole in the attic wall. "We'd call for Papa when there was thunder and lightning and he'd come upstairs and sing to us. *June bug sitting on a sweet potato vine.* I can still hear him. Miss Amy would call to him . . . tell him he was spoiling us . . . tell Bo she was afraid of her own shadow. Then Papa would make us all sing." Rosannah laughed her clear girlish laugh. Kathleen, her little half-sister, would wake up and come into the room, mad as fury for being waked up until Mr. Percy had her singing too. "Kathleen was such a pretty little girl, and little Rosannah is the image of her. You haven't seen my namesake, have you?" Rosannah turned to search my face, as if she might catch me out in a lie. "Well, she is the sweetest little girl in the world. Kathleen is crazy about her granddaughter. I don't know when I had anything please me so much as when they named her for me. I can't get over Kathleen being

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such a good business-woman, pretty as she is. Oh, how I long to live near my namesake!"

On Rosannah rambled through her childhood and her growing up. A relatively happy ramble until she remembered the responsibility her father and step-mother put on her, still a child, placing the ever growing band of children under her rule. "Rosannah was so responsible," Miss Amy had told me. "She was always a high-strung nervous person, and she needed something to do." So the children were turned over to her and whatever she said, they had to do. "I always backed her up," Miss Amy said. "Except with Nora. Rosannah would whip Nora, beat her until she had her clawing like a wildcat. Nora and Bo were frivolous . . . they didn't like doing the dishes. Nora was smaller than Rosannah and I had to forbid Rosannah to touch her. It's no wonder they never got along, own sisters though they were. Poor Nora . . . she was a beautiful girl and Aunt Matt's favorite. Aunt Matt told Rosannah she'd snatch her baldheaded if she ever laid hands on her sister again. I pity Rosannah. She takes life so hard. She said she wanted Nora and Bo to be serious like she was . . . to make something of themselves. . . Well, I guess she didn't mean any harm."

Aunt Matt had a practical head set on her short neck. She saw to it the girls learned housekeeping and the boys farming, that they learned how to work. "The world won't ever again be like it was," she told them, "and you'd better get that through your heads right now. All servants do is eat you out of house and home. You're *their* slaves now. . ." Rosannah saw she would have to make her own living if she was to escape Aunt Matt and the country, so she turned to home economics as it was called in school, and after she finished the courses at the female seminary in town, she went on to Columbia University for her Master's degree. Then Cousin Laura Phillips wrote to a friend who was in charge of home economics at the state university and Rosannah spent her life there, teaching. It was like that.

"Why," Rosannah said, "if it hadn't been for Uncle Lewis, I'd never have gone to college. He was the kindest man that ever was. He never teased me about not marrying. Oh, nobody knows how people have humiliated me! Nobody knows what I've been through! All my life asking me when I was going to get married. When Nora and Bo would go off to the outhouse to get out of

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helping with the dishes, Papa would tell me to get that thundercloud off my face . . . I'd ruin my complexion and I'd never catch a husband. Aunt Matt dinned it into my ears. Bo used to say Aunt Matt looked like a big black toad sitting out there on the porch. We all hated her. She spent her life humiliating me. She'd make me walk up and down in front of people to show them how straight I could walk if I wanted to. She ruined my life . . . my pigeon-toes, my thick ankles, my straight hair. Because I wasn't pretty like Nora. Oh, how I hated Aunt Matt! She ought to be in torment for what she did to me!

"But Papa didn't mean to be unkind," she went on. "He was just thoughtless of other people's feelings. And he had so much on him . . . all those children. But he'd tell me I didn't have to hold the world up on my shoulders . . . the dishes would wait until Nora and Bo got tired of looking at the Sears-Roebuck catalogue out in the privy." Rosannah's clear laugh rang out. "Papa was so full of fun," she said. "He would tease Bo and Nora about their beaux. They were always laughing and cutting up and getting into mischief. Papa never could resist them. Poor girls," Rosannah said then, in a light dry voice. "Putting up with what they put up with, just to be married. I guess they got what they deserved." Miss Amy said the Old Home was never the same after Nora and Bo married and went away . . . nobody to cut a step with Mr. Percy and flatter him. "Somebody had to take the responsibility. . ." Rosannah was talking again, and her voice was stern. "Somebody had to worry about what was to become of us . . . about educating all those children. People think Southern women didn't work. Why, Miss Amy worked like a slave. She drudged like everybody has to do when they live in the country. She never went anywhere but to church. But she was so slow . . . she was slow as molasses. How on earth did she raise all those children? I guess she never would have got it done if it hadn't been for Hamp and Modesta. Aunt Annie used to pity Miss Amy because she had all those children, and Miss Amy pitied Aunt Annie because she didn't have any. Aunt Annie will have a lonely old age, Miss Amy used to say. . ."

Aunt Annie, Uncle Lewis Paget's wife, was rising out of the past like a genie out of a bottle, taking shape, and driving down the years toward me in her Stanley Steamer and her frothy billowing veil. "Is Aunt Annie still living?" I asked Rosannah.

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"Living! Why, of course she is living. She just sold the Old Home!"

The world of childhood . . . a mirage that soaked back into the pavement, into the bulldozed dirt where no tree stood. Rosannah and I were rushing down the highway between the steep raw banks of a cut in the red earth. And looking up, I saw it, real before me. Suddenly. The Old Home. Like a rusty-white old horse, it teetered on the bank, rearing back to keep from falling into the cut, from toppling over on us. A jut of cornice, some peeling columns jacked up on bricks, a corner of the veranda sliced off to make way for a straight road. A glimpse through the car's rear window: a weather-beaten wall. And it was gone. We shot out into the open again and leviathan was hauling up in a spray of gravel, skidding to a stop alongside a rusty gasoline pump and a shack squeezed in between the strip of concrete and a dusty vine-covered knoll.

A big rumpled man slowly detached himself from the wall of the shack where his chair leaned. Cousin Will Phillips of Phillips's Hill. The little boy playing in the dirt at his feet jumped up and ran to hide. Mr. Will raised his wilted Panama hat off his head, without surprise. "I reckoned you'd be along this morning, Rosannah." He called to us above the rumble of the bulldozers pushing elephant-like against the dirt of the knoll, pushing it in crescendoes of noise: backing, advancing, pushing again. The hulks of old cars rotting there clattered and clanked against the bulldozer snouts. A tombstone rolled end-over-end like a tumbleweed. "I'm glad you had Cousin Percy's grave moved when you did," he said, coming toward us and fanning his face with his limp hat, his mouth smiling but his eyes veiled by their look of helpless wonder. "How've you been keeping, Rosannah?"

"Good morning, Will." Rosannah sounded almost demure. "Please fill the tank."

His responding laugh was an apology. "I haven't got a drop of gas, Rosannah. I'm closed down. As soon as they finish levelling off the old cemetery knoll they'll be pushing this over. I'm glad you moved Cousin Perce's grave. We ought to have had the others moved too. . . I wrote Cousin Annie about it, but I never could hear. . ." His shoulders sagged and rose as if he were consigning "the others" to a common grave of undone acts. "They'll be working across the road next and that will be the end of your Old

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Home. I hear Cousin Annie got a big price for it." Mr. Will's amiable voice rose, querulous. "Why in the name of heaven do they need another one of those super grocery stores? Can't those carpetbaggers from the mills cross the road to get their vittels of a Saturday night?" He dragged a white linen handkerchief out of his back pocket and wiped his forehead. "Well, I guess there's no use railing against the times. They're after my place and I reckon they'll get it next. They've boxed me in with concrete. I never wanted to live anywhere but here, but the times have gone off and left me. . . I'm about the only one left. . ."

"Will, I need some gasoline." Rosannah's voice had an edge to it. "I've always got my gasoline here!"

But Mr. Will continued on his way. "I guess it would be better to go. Sometimes I don't even know where I am. I look down the road and see the pond where we boys used to go swimming. Why, it was right down there where that road sign is." He looked off into the distance, in disbelief. "When I look up at your Old Home, I can still see Aunt Matt on the veranda, as big as a house in her black alpaca, with the pantry keys in her lap." Mr. Will laughed suddenly and boyishly, throwing back his head. "You remember how we boys would try to steal them? She never would let us have anything to eat between meals. We'd try to hook a wire into them when we thought Aunt Matt was napping. But she'd always open an eye and give us a thwack across the back with her cane. She kept us in line, all right. Do you remember the garden, Rosannah, there in front of the house with the boxwood planted in that odd way? What did they call it? I look over there and see us all when we were young and sometimes it seems more real than all this." He flung out his arm in an arc that seemed to sweep the world. Then he laughed, an affectionate chuckle. "Aunt Matt. She was a tough old customer, but I reckon we all loved her."

Rosannah's voice sounded, soft and deadly. "Loved her! I hated her! She was a cruel, hateful old woman!"

Mr. Will looked up, surprised to hear it said aloud. And I see Rosannah, in a path of the maze, as a child. She is walking along a path in the formal garden in front of the house, placing her feet carefully with her toes pointed straight. Her face is red and angry as her knees go up and down like pistons to propel her rigid little body along. Aunt Matt, a dumpy corseted black toad, sits on the

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veranda jabbing the boards with her cane, keeping time while the little girl picks up her feet, puts them down, one, two, one, two, jab, jab, jab, you'll never get a husband Rosannah if you're pigeon-toed. Then time changes and Rosannah, tall and slender with her feet hidden by a long skirt, is running across the veranda past Aunt Matt, and into the house. Once inside, her sobs break out and she plunges on, up the wide stairs. This is what Miss Amy told me. "I declare," she said, "Rosannah is just like the Fitzpatricks. She's a flash out of the same thunder."

"Why does she cry so much?" I asked Miss Amy.

"I don't know . . . I wish I knew. Maybe if she'd married Will Phillips. . . I reckon we always thought they'd marry, but something went wrong. It was a Sunday afternoon and Will had come over from Phillips's Hill, courting Rosannah. Old Willis Phillips was cousin to my husband and they'd always been neighbors. Will was a sweet child, easy and courteous. He was a great favorite of my husband. Percy always said Will would make the best farmer in our section . . . it was in the blood." Miss Amy had just walked into the big front hall when she heard Rosannah running across the veranda, and heard her sob as she plunged through the door and up the stairs. "When I looked out the door I saw Will bumbling around, trying to find his way out. And Aunt Matt sat there on the porch watching him, leaning forward propped on her cane. Aunt Matt was a cripple. She'd had an illness as a child. . . Maybe she wasn't watching Will. Maybe she was asleep. I never knew." Miss Amy never knew what had happened. Rosannah kept her own counsel and if Aunt Matt knew, she declined to say. "Well, Will Phillips never came courting Rosannah again. I haven't seen him for so many years," she said. "They say he isn't just all he should be, living out there in the country the way he does. But I don't know . . . he was such a gentlemanly boy, so faithful, somehow. . ." That fall, Rosannah went to live in town with her Uncle Lewis Paget and go to college; she never lived at home again. "She never did love Aunt Matt," Miss Amy said. "I never understood why. . ."

"Well," Mr. Will said at last, "I guess Aunt Matt never meant any harm."

But Rosannah was through with Aunt Matt. "What am I going to do for gasoline now?" she demanded.

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Will Phillips replied, easy and courteous, "I reckon you'll have to buy it, Rosannah . . . like everybody else."

Leviathan was gathering force, trembling, ready to plunge. "You tell Miss Amy I wanted to come," he called. "You tell her I honor her. Tell Toby I'd like to hear what's going on over there in Europe. Tell Stevie come to see me, hear?" The words followed us, like a sough of the wind. Looking back I saw him standing beside the skinny old pump, an arm thrown up across his eyes to ward off the spraying gravel. The little boy who had vanished behind the shack when we drove up, ran back to the pile of dirt he had been playing in at Mr. Will's feet. He was a shade too dark for suntan. Some indefinable something about him looked like somebody . . . the way he held his head . . . the way he threw it back to look after us as we leapt away. Then, when I saw him standing there, out in the open, it dawned on me. He was a smaller, a darker version of Mr. Will. And they were gone, swallowed up in the heat haze.

With the question almost bursting from my lungs, I turned to look at Rosannah. Rosannah too was looking back, but not at Will Phillips. She was looking back in time. "When I think about that formal garden it makes me so mad I don't know what to do," she said. "If my mother had lived she wouldn't have let Papa pull it out. That boxwood would be worth a fortune now, and they pulled it up. They just threw it away. They didn't care a rap about the old things. . ."

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Colette, Claudine, and Willy

COLETTE IS NOT, after all, respectable, or safely a credit to her sex. She is no somnambulistic celebrant of femaleness like the Brontë sisters, or Edna Millay, or Anaïs Nin. Nor is she, like George Eliot, a serious novelist who takes upon herself (besides a male name) that male conviction of responsibility which is sometimes a pretext for room-clearing didactic dullness. Nor is she—this anomaly—a lady and a genius like Jane Austen, moving without fuss through a sequence of cool and unconfessing masterpieces. Colette the author is from the outset attentive, unassuming, unceremonious, unreserved: she regards Colette the woman with continuous interest but without astonishment; she accepts no large responsibilities; she is candid, unprincipled, unladylike. Finally—so far does she miss perfection of any kind—her scandalous reputation is founded on fact; for Colette inaugurated her career, in five bad novels which compete at period naughtiness with the can-can and *La Vie Parisienne*,[1] by recounting the adventures of a heroine as coarsely fabricated and as calculatedly appealing as Fanny Hill, Little Eva, and Sade's Justine.

Claudine is one of those runaway first attempts that an author might later wish to repudiate if not forget: "a type," as Catulle Mendès prophesied, "but also a sort of punishment, a mistake that follows you, that sticks to your skin." Yet a half-century later, in the ripeness of fame, Colette did not repudiate her, indeed devoted two full volumes of the all-too-Complete Works to the Claudine series. Why such prodigal homage to apprentice pieces (belated and spoiled *juvenilia*)? The reason seems to have been Willy: Colette's determination, that is, to reclaim them for all time from the man, long dead, under whose name they[2] had been

[1] In which a number of her novels, including *Chéri*, were serialized!

[2] *Claudine à l'École* (1900), *Claudine à Paris* (1901), *Claudine en Ménage* (1902), and *Claudine s'en va* (1903). (Beginning in 1907, "Colette Willy" appeared together with "Willy" as author of the fourth Claudine; in 1911, as author of the first two; in 1924, as author of the third.) Willy allowed Colette to publish *Dialogues de Bêtes* under her own name alone ("Colette Willy"), in 1904; but in the same year she produced *Minne* for him and, in 1905, *Les Égarements de Minne* (the Minne books were later much revised and combined, and in 1909 published by "Colette Willy"

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printed and reprinted, in hundreds of editions, for fifty years.

It is a bizarre story. The circumstances of Colette's initiation (the word—suggesting ritual, passivity, sacrifice—is exact) into her unexpected profession are told with remote, sardonic, and poignant conclusiveness in *Mes Apprentissages*. At twenty, a country girl, she was married to a friend of the family, a Paris journalist fifteen years older, and brought by him to the capital. He proved to be an unusual man: Wagnerite, dandy, lachrymose sensualist, patron of the half-lighted and the semi-nude, uneasy and sinister overseer of many women; ingenious notoriety-seeker and prince of self-publicizing press-agents; bald and bearded fashionable fat man about whom Colette was unkind enough to recall that he looked less like Edward VII than like Queen Victoria; miser, cadger, compulsive account-keeper, property-owner under a confusion of false names, voluptuous martyr to bailiffs and minor distraints, petty gambler whose millionaire's manner thrilled the tables at Monte Carlo while he was losing five-franc chips; above all, promoter and general artistic entrepreneur who bullied and underpaid dozens of hacks (among them, eventually, his young wife) into manufacturing libraries of books "by Willy," but who himself "suffered from a sort of agoraphobia," a "horror of the blank page"—M. Willy, Henri Gauthier-Villars, this Offenbachian Mephistopheles from whom his most distinguished victim might wish to rescue even an unworthy part of her labor and herself, upon whom she might wish to be, even posthumously, revenged; who deserves, perhaps, even more elbow-room than the book in which she dryly memorializes him; whom, in affirming at the summit of her career her unshared right to Claudine, she officially acknowledges as her corruptor and her guide.

Without Willy, there would have been no Claudine (and possibly no Colette). Given Willy, always on the lookout for cash and "collaborators," it was inevitable that he should have turned at length to his wife, on the chance that her provincial-schoolgirl memories might be heated up to the city taste of the *Belle Époque*. "Don't be afraid of spicy details," he advised his docile apprentice; and the sorcerer became, as he liked to style himself with misleading accuracy, "the father of the Claudines." No doubt Willy con-

as *L'Ingénue libertine*). In 1907, after her divorce from Willy, "Colette Willy" appeared alone on the title-page of the last of the Claudines, *La Retraite Sentimentale*. Beginning in 1913 with *L'Envers du Music-Hall*, all of her new books were published under the name "Colette." A lovely maze for bibliographers.

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tributed nothing more than the recommendations and corrections with which Colette severely credits him. It is nevertheless evident that the sensation these books made in their time, as well as the longevity they have enjoyed, is the effect of Claudine's mixed parentage: boulevardier and country girl, mingling in an offspring whose energetic curiosity is incited and debased by the slyness and impurity of her character. Colette, denying Willy, claims Claudine; and so, from the clear height of a consummated *oeuvre* quite inaccessible to the author of the Claudines, claims Willy too.

Claudine speaks in her own pert voice, and she tells us—so she implies—all. She prides herself on being a free spirit, an informed and unscrupulous gossip. She is licentious in anticipation and in trivial experiment, she invents and searches out dubious situations, but her eroticism—in the first two novels and the last, especially—tends to be meanly vicarious, the eroticism of the eavesdropper and the peeping-Tom. She is contemptuous of stupidity, old age, men, and other women. The young Claudine measures the world from the refuge of her own untested inclinations; she is the winner in every contest she declines to enter. She is supposed to be coltish, capriciously lovable, even irresistible, and it is a fact that hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen from 1900 till the present have adored her.

The trouble is that, characteristically, Claudine has no imagination, only predictable impulses. Her "charm" is of a meager and repetitive kind, dependent on the famished prurience of the reader. She is a dated little object, and her date is Willy's gaslit heyday:

> To read more comfortably, [Dr. Dutertre] . . .[3] leaned a hand on my shoulder and rolled up one of my curls. . . . Lovely Aimée was standing near the door of the small classroom, and smiled at me so tenderly, with her golden eyes, that I was almost consoled for not having been able to talk with her today or yesterday except in front of my schoolmates. Dutertre put down my notebook and stroked my shoulders with an absent-minded air.
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> *
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> But here was a door slightly ajar, and my only thought was to look through the opening. Mlle. Sergent, sitting in her big armchair, had her back turned to me, luckily, and was holding her assistant on her

[3] In all quotations, three spaced periods—as here—indicate an omission I have made in the text. Three unspaced periods (a favorite device of Colette's) reproduce the punctuation in the text.

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lap, like a baby; Aimée was sighing softly and passionately kissing the Redhead, who was holding her tight. Bravo! Nobody can say that this Headmistress treats her subordinates badly! I didn't see their faces because the back of the armchair was too high, but I didn't need to see them. My heart was pounding in my ears, and suddenly I rushed down the stairs . . .

•

It seemed insane to me to think that I would no longer come here, that I would no longer see [Mlle. Sergent] . . . or her little Aimée with the golden eyes . . . or Luce, greedy for blows and caresses . . .

This is the Claudine of Montigny, before her introduction to Paris, worldliness, marriage, and other opportunities. Nor does she improve with age. Transported to Paris, she sidles delightedly up to the brink of hellfire, first of all in the company of her cousin Marcel, who is girlish enough to attract her admiring attention and depraved enough to hold it. In the image of plaything for his beloved Charlie, Marcel is exciting to her, and Claudine rewards him by inventing scabrous anecdotes about herself and her own little plaything, Luce:

". . .I finished by sitting on the bed and taking her on my lap. She joined her small hands behind my neck, hid her head on my shoulder and showed me, at the other end of the courtyard, the boys' dormitory where you could see them undressing at night."

"You saw them un...?"

"Yes, and they would make signs. Luce laughed very softly into my neck and beat my leg with her heels. I said to her: "Get up. . . . Mademoiselle's coming! But she suddenly flung herself upon me, and started to kiss me madly..."

"...Madly..." Marcel echoed, and his hands slowly turned cold in mine.

"Then I jumped up and almost knocked her down. She cried out very softly: 'You're wicked! wicked! heartless!' "

"And then?"

"And then I smacked her so hard that her arms were black and blue and her scalp tingled. I do a good job of hitting when I put my mind to it. She loved it. She hid her face and let herself be beaten, sighing deeply... . . . Sighing deeply, just as you are right now."

Later, in Marcel's Paris, Claudine happens to meet Luce, grown up into a knowledgeable kept woman. Luce describes with relish what it is like to be the mistress of a disgusting old man, and makes a strenuous, nearly successful effort to seduce our heroine. Do not fear: Claudine discovers in time her own true character, that she

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is "nothing but an ordinary respectable girl"; and so she is saved for marriage to Marcel's father, the handsome but aging Renaud.

Do not despair: Claudine does, finally and deliciously, fall. It appears—in *Claudine en Ménage* at any rate—that the principal reason for her marriage is to prepare and camouflage her surrender, under the cosiest and most teasing circumstances, to a homosexual affair. Heterosexuality serves, it appears, as an amusing and instructive preliminary to such rending pleasures:

> My haste equaled hers, dominated and subdued it. Revealed to myself, I pushed aside Rézi's caressing hands; she understood, shuddered, struggled for a brief moment, then lay back, her arms hanging limp...

In *Claudine s'en va,* we are permitted to observe Claudine from the viewpoint of awed innocence, young and timid Annie (herself a sort of Sadean Justine, jostled in a crowd of leering sophisticates). Faithful mirror, Annie is intended to exhibit for us the wit, the grace, and the achieved conjugal happiness of Claudine grown up.

But the wit is stale, the grace stiffens into a pose of feminist cynicism, and the happiness is easily dissolved in Claudine's chronic interest: soon enough, she can barely abstain from making mad Lesbian love to Annie. All this, then, plus the hanky-wringing pathos of Claudine's farewell to Annie:

> "I fear the Meeting. You will meet him, the man who has not yet crossed your path. Yes, yes," she replied to my gesture of protest, "he is waiting for you somewhere. It's right, it's inevitable. Only Annie, my dear Annie, be sure you recognize him, don't make a mistake, for he has doubles, he has multiple shadows, he has caricatures, there are, between you and him, all those you must step over or push aside..."
>
> "Claudine... suppose I grow old without meeting him?"
>
> She raised her graceful arm, in a gesture larger than herself.
>
> "Keep on! He will be waiting for you on the other side of life!"

In *La Retraite Sentimentale,* which may be the most arthritically actionless novel ever written by an important novelist, Claudine consecrates herself, in her country retreat, to an indefinite brooding about her husband, who is ill in a sanitarium. She is not too preoccupied, however, to practice her diversions: for instance, soliciting the confidences that Annie, a big girl now, has brought back from a spectacular career of hotel promiscuities; or, when Marcel comes on a visit, excitedly carrying through a plot

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to bundle into bed together the catamite and the nymphomaniac. *La Retraite Sentimentale* was published a year after Colette's divorce: if one wishes to blame Willy's menacing commercial demands—his mere *presence*—for the bad taste of the Claudines, it is hard to account for Number Five, which has not altogether shaken off the habit, at least, of bad taste.

Besides, it is not only bad taste that damages the Claudines. Technically, they fail to meet the standards of reliable hackwork. They do not move, they have no story to tell, no narrative momentum; they have no structure—the disposition of their events is quite random—and therefore no theme; they are inept at setting up scenes and incapable of dramatizing them; they do not generate that minimal attraction toward individual human motives which permits a critic of fiction to talk seriously about characterization.

Claudine à l'École makes an attempt to conceal its shortcomings in the rambling chanciness of an adolescent's diary, but no longer fresh, not yet history, not even (thanks to Willy) untampered with. Its sole dramatic resource is Claudine's tediously profitable voyeurism: everyone, thinking himself unwatched, is always doing something squalid for Claudine's edification and (presumably) ours. One character almost emerges from this factitious hurly-burly—the Headmistress, Mlle. Sergent, a woman with an authoritative manner and some hard-headed wit whenever she is allowed to disengage herself from her improprieties. Otherwise, what catches Claudine's eye is a pretty well picked-over tray of stereotypes, not much enlivened (in the intervals between scandals) by her notes on the eccentric diets of schoolgirls and the purportedly hilarious dialects of assistant pedagogues.

Claudine à Paris and *Claudine s'en va* have no excuse at all except the financial magic of their heroine's name. Both are ground out for an undiscriminating market, neither makes a pretense of direction or craftsmanship, and any youthful spontaneity that may have kindled moments of Claudine's schooldays is here as dead as Colette's illusions about Willy. (As for *Claudine s'en va,* even its title is a fraud. The book, subtitled *Journal d'Annie,* is in fact the story of Annie, for whom Claudine makes her infrequent appearances as a beacon and a star, the exemplar—sad to say—of civilized emancipation.) Formally, *Claudine en Ménage* comes off a bit better if for no other reason than that it has something resembling a plot: much of it gives the impression of a carefully

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articulated and protractedly savored pornographic anecdote, rather like a dirty postcard enlarged, retouched, and daintily colored by a department-store photographer. Perhaps *La Retraite Sentimentale* may be said to differ from its predecessors in being no longer deliberately meretricious and saleable (except for the Annie-Marcel episode and a few of Annie's gamier secrets); but it is mostly a pretentious ruminative bore, a pointless and foolish novel notwithstanding. To make a casual circuit of these five moth-eaten museum-pieces is to arrive at a decisive (though hasty) judgment, that Colette is not a novelist; or that, at best, she is a bad novelist.

At any rate, looking into the monument of a Collected Edition the contents of which have been chosen and arranged by their author, already full of years and honors,[4] one is startled to find not only volumes of *juvenilia,* not only embarrassingly feeble *juvenilia,* but *juvenilia* contrived and realized as the trashiest and most time-ridden of pot-boilers. And yet, turning the pages with growing exasperation and incredulity, one continues to seek in these books, and out of faith in the mysteries of genius expects to find, redeeming touches also, sensitivities, germinations, prefigurements of later triumphs, premonitions of zest and ease, any excuses whatever for keeping one's temper and good humor; so Maria le Hardouin, finishing with the Claudines, tries to cheer herself up in a peroration the rhetorical expansiveness of which gauges her relief at having happened on a reason for speaking favorably of them:

> Then, struggling toward us through this throng of pleasure-seeking women and these men whose only mission seems to be "to unleash the small, wicked, unscrupulous beast in every woman," come the first two reassuring emissaries of the animal kingdom, freshly descended from that ark from which all Colette's beloved animals will later emerge, the only two representatives of purity: Fanchette the cat and Toby-Dog.
>
> From the moment that Colette reverts to her true self, she discovers once more what is noblest in her own being: her communion with

[4] As late as 1950, in France, a possible sunset glory for a celebrated living author (the latest American instance was the New York Edition of Henry James, in 1907; and the economics of American publishing intimate that it was very likely the last). Glenway Wescott has summed up the comforting substantiality of Colette's enshrinement: "fifteen volumes, seven thousand pages, two million words, in that handsome format which finally crowns the French literary life: laid paper with margins, red ink as well as black." Glenway Wescott, "Introduction" to *Short Novels of Colette,* New York, 1951, ix.

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nature and the animal world. The closing pages of *La Retraite Sentimentale* are impregnated with this life-giving force, and it is these pages that make the book seem better than it is. They open a breach through which we can escape far from the human intrigues that have failed to hold our interest.[5]

Well, yes. Toby-Dog is an affectionately observed image of the nearly speaking slavish pathos of household mutts:

Only Toby-Dog recognized [that I was upset] . . . ; little black gnome lying under my table. . . . Anxious, his coat trembling, he stood up on his short hind legs, resting on the table-cloth his monstrous head with Negro's eyes; he had the gleaming teeth and the thick paws of a silly demon issuing from Hell. So I caressed him and mentally I begged his pardon.

Fanchette the cat is, as Claudine herself remarks, "far more . . . interesting and understanding" than "that inferior cat," Luce:

You have amused me from the moment you came into the world; you had only one eye open when, already, you were trying martial steps in your basket, though you were still unable to keep upright on your four matchsticks; ever since, you've lived joyously, and you make me laugh with your belly-dances in honor of May-bugs and butterflies, your clumsy challenges to the birds you are stalking, your ways of arguing with me and giving me hard taps that echo sharply on my hands. You lead a disgraceful life; two or three times a year, I see you out on the garden walls, with a crazy, ridiculous look on your face, a gang of tomcats surrounding you. . . . But even during these periods of madness, when you catch sight of me, your natural expression returns for a moment, you meow a friendly something like: "You see, this is how it is with me; don't despise me too much, nature makes its demands, but I'll come back soon and lick myself for ever so long to be purified of these shameful goings-on." O beautiful white Fanchette, it so becomes you to behave badly!

—an apostrophe which, moreover, astringently evokes the attitude and the life that Colette (speaking out, in this little parable, with unusual ironic force through the customarily trivial Claudine) regards as the lot of women, their disreputable and splendid doom.

As for the conclusion of *La Retraite Sentimentale,* it does in fact draw together in nocturnal quiet Colette's genuine feelings for animals and rural scenery:

Two winters already have brought me shivering back to the fire of tree-stumps, with my retinue of animals and books, my rosy lamp, my little maroon pot for boiling chestnuts, facing the easy-chair with

[5] Maria le Hardouin, *Colette,* tr. Erik de Mauny, Staples Press, London, 1958, 84f.

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the arm-rests worn threadbare by Renaud's arms... Two springs, already, have reopened my whole dark house upon a garden flaming with crimson buds and slender irises whose stems are too tall... The sun casts me outside, the rain and the snow urge me, with sovereign hand, toward the house... But is it not rather I who command, sighing with tiresome heat, the sudden burst of rain-swollen clouds, or, with a glance turned away from the book and the dear portrait, the return of the sun, of the swallow reaping the air, and the leafless blooming of the crocuses and the white plums?...

At the trembling of the little dog who crouches against my knees, I awaken and feel that I have forgotten the time. It is night... I have forgotten the time to eat, the time to sleep approaches... Come, my animals! Come, discreet little creatures who respect my dreaming! You are hungry. Come with me toward the lamp that reassures you. We are alone, forever. Come! We shall leave the door open for the night to enter, and its perfume of invisible gardenia, and the bat hanging in the muslin curtains, and the humble toad squatting under the threshold... and also the one who will not leave me, who will watch over the rest of my life, and for whom, unsleeping, I keep my eyelids shut, the better to see him...

Yet the motif of death is arty and unearned, especially as one remembers its nominal provocation, Renaud, whom Colette herself eventually dismissed as "hollower, lighter, and emptier than those glass apples spun out to decorate Christmas trees." Not only this. The passage is otherwise, and as a whole, persistently soft and self-indulgent (the drizzle of triple dots, for instance, is Colette's own punctuation—an enamored lingering over unexamined emotions), representative of the lengthy descriptions for which Colette shows a special weakness in *La Retraite Sentimentale:* pillowy, enervated, hypnotic rhythms full of the names of trees, birds, and flowers. The astute Willy, blue-penciling some of his young wife's early flights, made the definitive comment: "I didn't realize, my dear, that I'd married the last of the lyric poets." Willy may not have known what novelists ought to do, but he knew what they ought to withstand—the temptation to substitute prose-poems for dramatic action.

Colette, like many other writers brought up in the country, was an enthusiastic amateur botanist and zoölogist: she could always turn out rhapsodic, impressively minute descriptions of plants and animals (as D. H. Lawrence could), and often these descriptions (as in Lawrence) seductively evade the novelist's responsibility to the human permutations of the world and of his invention. It is likely that Colette's talent for a kind of scientifically pastoral prose

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is what causes her reminiscences of her mother and of her childhood—*La Maison de Claudine* and *Sido,* particularly—to be rated, amusing and touching as they are, even above her best fiction,[6] which does a much harder job in much more economical and less conspicuous ways. In any case, no novelist is discoverable in the charming outdoor observations that are regularly scattered, like tidy patches of sunlight, through *La Retraite Sentimentale.* Colette the novelist is committed elsewhere. The Colette who was later to write *Chéri,* if she appears at all in her earliest novels, appears as the captive and anatomist of the very obsessions that Willy prescribed for his grubby public and may have thought he had satanically imposed on his characterless and unresisting mate. The obsessions are, from the beginning, powerfully Colette's own.

Not that Willy could have understood what he was awakening with his conjurations, his mere naming of monsters of the deep. What moves and struggles—sometimes obscurely, sometimes with a sugared smirk, sometimes with shocking exigency—in these cardboard coffins of novels is a brute curiosity, a cannibal appetite, a vertigo of sensuality; nothing like poor mild Willy's hankering after Shakespearean boy-girls in chemises, his palate for the bourgeois domesticities of paternal vice. What Colette is threatening to disclose, through the trifling façade of her best-sellers, is a morality that would have offended or even frightened Willy if he had been able to recognize it:

> As for me, I do not seek pleasure, rather it seeks me, finds me, attacks and confounds me with hand and mouth so rough that it makes me shudder... Or else it prowls slowly round me, fatigues me with its invisible approach, against which a dull pride strains in me... It is in this troubled instant that between Renaud and me stands an antagonism which I relish, which is no longer our faithful love, which is neither tender nor merciful, which bares its teeth in defiance and snarls: "I will have you before you have me...."

This is the authentic note, whenever Claudine steps out of her frivolous rôle and assumes the authority of self-discovery:

> Still worse: Renaud has revealed to me the secret of pleasure given and felt, and I guard it, and I enjoy it passionately, like a child with a deadly weapon.

Or when she hears the narcissist Annie tell another kind of truth about women:

[6] As by Elaine Marks, *Colette,* Rutgers University Press, 1960, Chap. XVI, 200ff.

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". . .Women like you, you are the ones who say: 'Love, ah!...' and you surround it with many pretty phrases. As for me, it's my body that thinks. It's cleverer than my brain. It feels more finely, more completely than my brain. When my body thinks—that is, when I... when it... . . . Well! . . . . At those moments all of my skin has a soul...."

Or when Marcel mourns the passing of youth:

". . . ah! youth!... It isn't *my* youth I grieve for, but theirs! What will become of them, all my lovely boys? For each one who keeps himself smooth, slim, and white, how many turn into sad young roosters with their husky crowing, spotted with pimples, soiled with beards, ashamed of themselves, trailing like imbeciles after every skirt in the kitchen... Their hands thicken, their voices change, their noses, oh! their distressing noses! And that tangle of hair everywhere, and... Ugh!... they are young men, if you will, but it's no longer the intoxication of adolescence, beauty without a flaw, alas! and impermanent... young flesh..."

Hostility and deadlock in the sexual embrace, monomania in the prison of self; sensuality and the tooth of time—Colette has discovered her subject, and the irrelevance to it of Willy's naughtiness and the world's propriety. Many years after, in one of her most remarkable books, *Le Pur et l'Impur,* Colette discusses with regal impartiality and a bleak tenderness all the improper kinds of love; and she concludes with a wry meditation on the word "pure":

> This word . . . that fell from her mouth, I listened to its brief trembling, the plaintive *u,* the *r* of limpid ice. It awakened nothing in me, save the need to hear again its unique resonance, its echo as of a drop that wells up, detaches itself, and rejoins an invisible water. The word "pure" has not disclosed to me its intelligible meaning. I can only quench an optical thirst for purity in the transparencies that evoke it, in the bubbles, the massive luster, and the confined imaginary landscapes, out of reach, at the heart of a dense crystal.

The mature Colette is a hedonist by temperament, by circumstance, by accumulated total conviction, with neither doubts nor *fin-de-siècle* illusions, untroubled by the romantic schizophrenia of worship and renunciation; indifferent to the world's judgment, insensitive to nothing about pleasure except the world's prohibitions that strive to hedge it in; calmly aware of natural limits, contemplating "the monotony of the things of love"; recorder and

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philosopher, with equal sympathy, of what the world discriminates into pure and impure; fascinated and accurate spectator of the senses, those demoniacal and dying vessels; skeptic of the constructions of abstract intellect, that male invention; the historian, therefore, of undomesticated women, of whom the Claudine of *Claudine en Ménage* is her earliest, indeed a premature, instance:

> Alas! How strange that the appearance of what I love, [Rézi's] . . . beauty, the loveliness of the Fresnois woods, my desire for Renaud, rouses in me the same emotion, the same hunger for possession and intimate embrace!... Am I then able to feel in only one way?....

This erotic synesthesia is Claudine's, in *Claudine en Ménage;* it is *Claudine en Ménage* that, of the series, rewards an unimpatient second look by most plainly exemplifying the youthful Colette's attempts at locating and mastering her subject; and it is *Claudine en Ménage* that is the most disappointing for what it promises and what it might have been. It is a novel that Colette ought to have written twenty-five years later, out of the shadow of Willy and in the fullness of her powers: it proposes a sizable and —for her, at the time she undertook it—far too difficult fictional problem.

Like most writers about love, Colette has a penchant for the triangle (in *La Chatte,* a man, a woman, and a cat!). *Claudine en Ménage* sets up what appears to be a salaciously unconventional triangle by maneuvering two women, Claudine and Rézi, into an affair under the approving gaze of Claudine's husband; but in the end it jars us back to convention by exposing Claudine as the simultaneous dupe of her husband and her mistress: a prolonged and breathy Lesbian affair turns out, after all, to have been a blind for mere routine philandering. So far, so good. As a conception, the ballet-like theatricality of these postures and reversals is hopeful.

Unfortunately, the conception is visible only in so brief a plot-summary, which cannot indicate tone, attitude, focus, proportion. As Colette wrote it out, *Claudine en Ménage* has little room for elegances and intricacies of arrangement: rather than balancing infernal passion against commonplace adultery, it luxuriously dwells on infernal passion, which is of course the commodity that Willy's pop-eyed customers are paying for. The novel fails first and most obviously, then, because of the author's disingenuous partiality for the Lesbian attachment; and perhaps we can agree

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that Willy shares the blame. Colette does, however, have a more private responsibility. She reveals it, less obviously and more interestingly, in what she tells us of the heroine's state of mind during the affair; for Claudine's unresolved perplexity is the young author's own, it is an argument with herself, a tentative and nervous self-confrontation, and it tends to defeat whatever residual concern she may feel for the integrity of the conception.

> "I take a lover, without love, simply because I know it's wrong: that is vice. . . . Vice is the wrong one does without enjoying it."

So the uninitiated Claudine reasons, anxiously; and, superintended by her amenable husband, who considers female homosexuality "charming and unimportant," she decides at length that she does in fact have the excuse of love, yields to Rézi's emollient wooing, and tries to enjoy herself. Rarely, Colette manages to juggle the elements of the situation in a glitteringly dangerous way:

> Rézi, silent, followed [her husband] . . . with a look of black hatred. He walked at a regular pace, reached the shadowy alcove opening on the main drawing-room, and continued his promenade. His measured pace brought him back toward us, up to the fire that lighted from below his hardened features and his opaque eyes. A few inches from me, he did a military right-face and went off again.
>
> I remained seated, uncertain.
>
> Rézi's eyes became diabolical; she calculated her spring... Raising herself to me with a noiseless effort, she mastered me with a maddeningly sweet mouth and an arm around my neck. Above mine, her wide-open eyes listened to the steps moving away, and her free hand, in the air, marked the rhythm of her husband's pace, in time with the trembling of her lips that seemed to count the beating of my heart: one, two, three, four, five... Like a cut cord, her grip fell away; [her husband] . . . turned round; Rézi was again sitting at my feet, and seemed to be reading something in the fire.
>
> Indignant, surprised, horrified by the real risk she had just run, I could not suppress a quivering sigh, a cry of anguish...
>
> "Did you say something, dear lady?"
>
> "Why, dear sir, you must put me out! It's frightfully late... Renaud must be looking for me at the Morgue!"
>
> "Let me flatter myself that he would look here first."
>
> I'd like to hit that man!
>
> "Rézi... goodbye..."
>
> "See you tomorrow, dear?"
>
> "Tomorrow."

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More often, though, what (in an uncompromised corner of the novel) might have been a sour sex-farce in the manner of Anouilh —or, later in Colette's career, one of her compact tragedies of savage colliding monads—collapses into a detailed account of sensual abandonment, wrenched and uncontrolled, less like Willy's siren-song than like an outcry that ought to respect the privacy of the analyst's couch:

> I saw, close enough to graze it with my mouth, the perfectly curved shoulder, Rézi's anxious profile, and, below, a young uncovered bosom, divided and round like those that are toyed with in the racy engravings of the eighteenth century... I saw all that, stupefied, and didn't say a word, and didn't at first feel the intense eyes she raised toward me. Those eyes recalled me at last, but I left them again for the unique whiteness of that untinted and shadowless skin and the breasts that ended suddenly in pink, the same pink as the polish on her nails...
>
> Rézi, victorious, followed my wandering eyes. But, because they had settled insistently, she weakened in her turn, and her eyelids fluttered like wasp's wings... Her eyes darkened and rolled back, and she was the one who murmured: "Enough... thanks..." in a turmoil as flagrant as mine.
>
> "Thanks..." That breathed word, which mingled sensuality with childishness, precipitated my defeat more than a deep embrace would have been able to hasten it.

If, in a context of commercial aphrodisia, the effect of such a raw and hallucinated confession is sentimental—a sort of stunned doting over a garage-calendar nude—and therefore laughable, it is because we would be distressed to take it as seriously, for clinical purposes, as we suspect we ought.

Resolutions and clarities will come later. It is not that the Claudine novels are a puzzle, but that so many outsiders had a hand and stake a claim in them—Willy; Willy's public; Willy's young wife, locked in her room, crossly scrawling newsstand pornography in her lined grade-school notebooks. Struggling to be born out of such a crowd, mired in their demands and shortcomings, mingling and confusing their lubricities with her own terrors and passions, Colette makes her earliest appearance in a state somewhat less than glorious and orderly. Luckily, she will have all the time she needs.

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VERNON YOUNG

One Man's Film Festival:

The 24th at Venice, 1963.

PREFACE. These notes on the 24th International Film Festival at Venice last August-September are offered with the awareness that my view of the occasion was indubitably colored by the physical circumstances under which I attended, and on the supposition that *Hudson Review* readers would in any case be more receptive to an attempt, however personal, at conveying the ambience of such an occasion than by an effort to rehearse dispassionately the content of thirty or more films, most of which they'll never see—and should not if I know what's good for them.

Subject-Object. Clarifying data is called for if I expect the reader to appreciate the consternation with which, from time to time, the ensuing *obiter dicta* may be animated. At the Palazzo Cinema, within two weeks, thirty new films were on view: twenty of these were submitted or invited *in concorso,* i.e. to compete. Concurrently there was a showing of Retrospective Films (of Max Linder, of Buster Keaton and of various Soviet Russians, 1924-1939). Other *recent* films were offered to the insatiable, *ex officio,* at a local Lido cinema: these were usually award-takers from less celebrated festivals—Locarno, Karlovy Vary, etc. Altogether, if you had been intent on not missing an item of this abundance, you would have been required to see 60 films in 14 days! Fortunately for my concentration, to say nothing of my mental health, I had in the recent past (just love that term) seen over half of the Retrospectives and I passed up many of the remainder in favor of grabbing a sandwich. None the less I discover, after incredulous recount, that I saw thirty-five (35) films in the fortnight. Of those in competition I missed only one, *Tom Jones* (regrettably).

Predication. A film festival is no place for a film critic. I write that more in sorrow than in anger. And with no ingratitude toward the organizers of the Venice affair nor toward the incredibly accommodating Press Office staff. This is not a glad-hand parenthesis. I'm convinced that here, as elsewhere, the social and commercial aspects have obscured the loftier intention. For the committee that designs the Festival events, the purpose is to exhibit work in progress, an aim intelligently substantiated in the catalogue (edited by Luigi Chiarini, if I'm not mistaken, and a more valuable contribution to film bibliography than many with greater pretensions). For film-makers who have been invited to participate, the Festival is a contest and/or a trial of nerves. For the dealers who spend much of their sour time elsewhere saying that Art doesn't pay off, it's frequently Big Business. For the

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journalist who is accustomed to reporting quantity from the top of his head to meet deadlines, it's News. But anyone who arrives at a Festival with some such tag in his mind as "The best that's been thought and said in the world" or "Let's see how these films stand up to the Tintorettos" will shortly discover what he should have already known —that if in any company a critic is a fifth wheel, at a film festival he resembles one of those importunate skeletons in the old Dance-of-Death engravings, reminding commoners and queens alike of their mortality. Even this figure over-rates his importance in the scene. The point is that a film festival is no place for disinterested scrutiny and judgment, or at least it's not an occasion when discussion can be shared on such a basis. There's no *time* for reflection, the atmosphere forbids it, one's acquaintances are embarrassed by it. Everybody is on the make —for a story, for self-aggrandizement, for a contact or a contract. For most "film-people," whether or not their job is to *write about* film, moviemaking seems to be a competitive sport. For them, the value of the individual film is not the quality of the experience it yields but its rating in a kind of Grand National—an arbitrarily decided finish line, and hurdles to clear—wherein the current favorite is the director who has most adroitly surpassed his contemporaries at being contemporary —or is ahead by a neck.

The Setting. I'll confess that I compounded the attendant pressures at the 24th by committing two strategic errors: living in Venice instead of on the Lido—and making a glutton of myself with the program set before me. (One of these is a Deadly Sin.) To commute daily in those murderously over-laden bump-and-grind vaporettos during vindictively humid weather, to resist day and night, night and day, *noise noise noise,* to attempt as many Press Conferences as would give one a "fair idea" of what transpires thereat, to make appointments with sundry people who don't show up, for conversation which is usually fruitless if they do: all this is the quintessence of instability (if it can be said that instability has a definable essence), no ground on which to base an objective report—whatever that may be! . . . In the wake of the matter, with the amphibious city still rocking beneath my feet, I must none-the-less acknowledge a kind of aesthetic consistency to seeing motion pictures—by their nature infirm, dissolving, transitory—in this terraqueous *ambiente.* For Venice is as insubstantial as it is imposing, a beguiling labyrinth everywhere resistant to continously lucid apprehension. And just as one struggles there to keep in the mind's eye a clear, single unit of scenography to prevent one's sense of the place from leaking away in a montage of interfluent arcades, *loggiati,* humped bridges, constricting alleys, sunset-tinted finials, bobbing gondolas and incessant upheavals of the insolent, trash-laden sea, even so at the Film Festival one makes hourly repair of self-control and vigilance in order to salvage from the inexhaustible flow of images, sounds and meretricious substitutes for vision whatever moments will

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uphold one's conviction that a film is potentially a work of art and that a work of art is a structure of the human imagination. "Man is a reed," I would tell myself doggedly every day at 5 as I reached for the double-Scotch without which I could have no longer sustained either observation or courtesy—"the frailest thing in nature, it says here, but he's a *thinking* reed . . . hold on to that."

Salient Impressions. 1. This was a very Italian event—not so idiotic a tautology as it may appear! Italian films on the contemporary program outnumbered those from any other country and in two of them the setting was Venice, itself, an overlapping circumstance that tended to enforce, naturally enough, the moral solidarity of the largely Italian audience. There were three Italians on the seven-man jury, which meant that if these three were in agreement they had only to convince one of the remaining dissenters. I'm not privy to what went on behind those doors; I only know that almost before the first screening of *Le Mani sulla Citta (Hands on the City)* was over, the conclusion was foregone. (The Festival had three days yet to run, but only one film remained to be judged *in concorso,* Martin Ritt's *Hud).* Frankly I'm inclined to believe that Rosi's film would have taken the Silver Lion without the Italian influence, offered as the single explanatory factor by many who didn't approve the decision. In the absence, otherwise, of a single film so distinguished as to overwhelm all lesser argument, the choice was predictable. For there's no gainsaying the fact that critical consensus, internationally, is unable to resist the intimidating appeal of film as a political weapon. On the Italian side, there were special incentives: the popularity of the Communist director, Francesco Rosi; the closeness of his subject (collusion between politicians and business interests in the ruthless promotion of mass-housing schemes) to national feelings of indignation; above all the Italians' love of public debate, *fortissimo.* I find most remarkable the inference of a fluctuating principle of selection, year by year, since social utility could scarcely have been the criterion by which, e.g., *Marienbad* was honored, two festivals ago! Evidently each jury is on its own. This may not be an unwise policy; specified principles have a way of hardening into standardized assumptions. Anyway, there are so many counter- and auxiliary awards given, at Venice or elsewhere, that sooner or later justice is done.[1] (Not to all. *Do not presume. One of the thieves was hanged . . .*) Rosi's film was a shrewd and probably accurate analysis of political alignments in a hypothetical crisis. As an exercise in forensics, it left little to be desired. Whether or not it was creative

[1] Some instances: *A Sunday in September* (Sweden, Jorn Donner) and Chris Marker's *Le Joli Mai* shared First Film awards; *Il Terrorista,* a first work of Gianfranco de Bosio, received the City of Venice prize; an association of critics, based in Vienna, voted Alain Resnais' *Muriel* the best Festival film; and shortly after the close of the Festival, Ricardo Fellini (brother to Federico), whose *Stories on Sunday* was suddenly disclosed as having delighted Japanese observers, was invited to make a film in Japan.

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film-making was a distinction nobody cared for less than Rosi himself; he made that clear at his conference.

2. Our age is desperately in love with its own collective image: this familiar and inescapable conclusion was again forced upon the awareness of a critical viewer by a nucleus of films in the Festival repertory—they comprised the most popular—exploiting the rage for topical identification. *Cinema vérité* is the chic term for a new disintegration of style which has taken place everywhere in misguided, if well-intentioned, emulation of certain young French masters of the New Wave. The incorporation of urban actuality, caught on the run, as it were, within a fictional context *(Jules et Jim* or *Cleo)*, or the frank use of the real *as if it were fiction (Un Coeur Gros comme Ça)* apparently looks easy to a host of enfranchised film-makers who haven't the verve or the nuance of Truffaut and Agnes Varda, nor the visionary perception of François Reichenbach. In this pursuit of a new personalizing of the documentary method, there is wide recourse to the zoom lens, the concealed camera or microphone, the informal tracking shot and many other devices. The end result is neither personal nor progressive: it returns the art of the film to a muddled compromise with the newsreel and the T.V. interview, and we are asked to accept, as revolutionary, films that tell us nothing more about the fragmented life which daily surrounds us than the latest copy of *Paris Match* or *Life*. Among films at the 24th which more-or-less fitted this category were *In Capo il Mondo,* an expressionist autobiography shot in Venice by a newcomer, Tinto Brass; *Le Joli Mai* of Chris Marker, an American in Paris—a roving non-story film of a season in the French capital; *La Belle Vie,* first-feature of Robert Enrico (you've probably seen the long-short he made of an Ambrose Bierce tale), allegedly the story of an Algerian-war veteran's discontent but mainly an actuality-editorial of international violence; *Dragées au Poivre*—it means something like *confections,* I gather, and was a parody by Jacques Baratier of practically everybody else's film-making (i.e. of everybody fashionable). Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World* is related to *cinema vérité,* although the descriptive use of tracking background shots, not directly involved in the story-line, may have been suggested by the Danish film made in South Africa, *Dilemma.* Cesare Zavattini's *Mysteries of Rome* (shot by a dozen cameramen—none of them introduced to each other, I'd hazard) was a glib mixture of the French process with left over attitudes from early *neo-realismo,* in the creation of which Zavattini, himself, was once the glorious pioneer. Why at this stage (either of his life or of his career) Zavattini should suppose there's anything novel or even diverting in the *voyeur* tactics his cameramen employed to surprise lovers on the banks of the Tiber or to interview whores and strip-teasers is the only "mystery" purveyed by his film. I was fairly bored by Chris Marker's interminable vignettes of the everyday but by contrast with those of Zavattini they were various and often lyrical.

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The Rome-in-a-day film showed us a city in which there is no intellectual activity, no responsible private life with vivid content, nobody performing fruitful work, no theater, no music above the jukebox level, no art galleries, no feeling of history except in a gratuitous shot of Santa Maria della Pace by night, as who should say—"That's the lousy past, labelled For Tourists Only." Perhaps I'm being naive. Most people in the know here were ready to assure me that Zavattini's emphasis on the poor, the outlaw, the sick and the exploited was neither an outcome of the limited view nor an expression of Christian charity: it was a piece of calculated political opportunism.

Louis Malle's film, *Le Feu Follet* (literally *Fatuous Fire,* which may present something of a challenge to foreign distributors) was in one respect affiliated with *cinema vérité:* it employed the concerto form (one soul moving through an exterior world in which it can find no solace) but far more purposively than Enrico's *La Belle Vie,* for instance. Malle has taken some curious directions since he came up for air some years ago from Cousteau's *The Silent World*—he was one of its principal cinematographers—and I've always followed him with confidence, even through the terminal footage of *The Lovers* and of *Private Life,* for when he's in control of his material throughout a film, there's not a more intelligent director in the Paris School. *Le Feu Follet* is under control: a skilfully modulated film on a perilously morbid subject—the last hours of a dying alcoholic, as he persuades himself that none of the solutions arrived at by his friends are valid for him. What Malle has and many of his younger contemporaries with Balzacian ambitions are in need of is a *precise* sense of the social milieu engaged at any moment. The others either ignore half of society (usually the polite half, not because it's less viable but because it takes more subtlety to discover in it what is cinematically effective)—or believe they're capturing a wealth of significance by dropping in for five minutes to borrow a cup of sugar. Furthermore, Malle's fluency in this case doesn't run away from the inceptive point of view; the film is unfailingly guided by a controlling consciousness, and I mean Malle's, primarily, not the protagonist's. Now, this is exactly what the extreme members of the *verité* group want to reject, in the belief that they're freeing themselves from a limiting convention. Their own method is the more limited, however, since it sacrifices discrimination for multiplicity. At best it makes gains in energy, and that's unarguably the principle through which the film medium is renewed. But energy in itself will never invest a film with distinguishing value: only insight, under control, will do that.

An incidentally exciting failure at the Festival, pertinent to the subject I'm touching lightly, was Kurasawa's *High and Low* (I believe that's the American-release title). Here was a film loaded with energy and certainly not lacking in insight; but at some point in the conception, or perhaps during production, Kurasawa tried to say too many

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things and in too many different ways. The first third of the film, theatrically if not cinematically expert, raised an ethical problem, which might well have occupied the whole film. Abruptly he solved the problem, and then came a fascinating section of pure detective-story, no less masterful than Hitchcock at his old best. After a flight-and-pursuit climax wherein the teeming life of Tokyo was more sensuously present than Paris has been in any New Wave film I know of, Kurasawa changed tone again for a final and terrifying confrontation with a nihilist criminal, as if he were trying to warn us of the insensate hatred at the core of our expanding city of mass-man.

Between the Acts. The Press Conference can be a diverting escapade. The unawarded performer in this comedy at the 24th, *designato in concorso,* was an American girl from Trieste, required to translate Italian questions for a director who could handle only French—or vice versa—then translate the answers and often, to be obliging, ask if anyone needed a further translation, of both question and answer, into English—or Swahili. Remember this at your feasts when you coldly read a stupefying utterance purported to have issued from the mouth of an artist justifying his existence before the Venice tribunal . . . Not that stupefying utterances weren't uttered. I'll vouch for Joseph Losey's because I had no difficulty in understanding him. His syntax, I mean. Some paradoxical undertone of his argument eluded me, leaving me baffled and shaken as if I had just seen his film. In fact I had. Losey, defending the catastrophe which some few of us insisted had overtaken that film *(The Servant)* at about the ⅔ mark, first tried the Robbe-Grillet strategy of implying that the ambiguity was too sacred to be defined except by the individual observer. (The movie is you, dear reader, *you.*) Soon he was protesting that he had made a very *moral* film and I don't think any of us was ruffled by that admission. But in response to I-didn't-hear-what controversial question (everyone talking simultaneously) there he was, asking bitterly (I thought he was going to cry), "Do you know what it's *like* to be a *servant*?"—which, Lord love us, was the first inkling any of us had that "the servant," depicted in the film as a fairly unmitigated rotter, was secretly Mr. Losey's hero! . . . This was *not* my Favorite Moment. Too painful. I preferred the inscrutability of the Japanese delegate who, upon being asked by an Austrian fellow-viewer why the four fisherfolk (in Kaneto Shindo's *The Man*), dying of starvation in a drifting rudderless boat, didn't try *to fish,* replied with impeccable seriousness: "If they had done so, the film would have had a radically different ending."

Conclusions. Not general conclusions: I've already incorporated those. Here I want to pay brief attention to those films at the 24th I'm likely to recall favorably hereafter . . . I'm no unqualified believer in a Golden Age of the Silents, yet I'll concede that there was more cinematic art in the Retrospectives than in the parallel program. To my taste for wonder, the greatest film *shown* during the Festival was *Salt*

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for Svaneti, made in the wilds of the Caucasus by M. Kalatozov, 1929-1930. The substance of this magnificent documentary poem was the fantastic ritualism employed by a feudal community in response to a weird phenomenon of nature that threatened its existence.[2] (Present-day Russia was represented *in concorso* by two characteristically boring products of the Soviet which has eliminated the backward ceremonies of life and death available to Kalatozov. I'll not belabor the irony.) . . . If I now took up space for restating the familiar genius of Buster Keaton or for praising the unfamiliar genius of the no less ingratiating Max Linder I'd have to sacrifice indispensable paragraphs of tribute to a handful of contemporary film-makers who deserved more tribute than they collected.

Neither *Le Feu Follet* (mentioned previously) nor *Billy Liar* are in desperate need of recommendation. Malle's film received the Special Prize and the popularity of *Billy Liar* was already proven in pre-Festival release. I was gratified to see that Schlesinger, who recreated the Beastly Life with such uncompromising fidelity in *A Kind of Loving* that the reflection was as unbearable as the image, is not averse to a more oblique interpretation of the same subject—and with no loss of asperity. *Billy Liar* is inventive, extremely funny and intensely painful.

Il Demonio, an *opera prima* of Brunello Rondi, was the only Italian film I found enthralling. Preceded by a scholarly testimonial to its veracity, it purported to re-enact the "recent" persecution, in a Lucanian village, of a young woman (no doubt less attractive by far than Dahlia Lavi) under the stress of an erotic obsession and hallucinations. The villagers' methods of exorcising her "devils" included rape, setting fire to her family's house and stoning her from the precincts. She was finally stabbed to death, after ecstatic sexual consummation, by the object of her desire, the man whom she had succeeded in demoniacally luring from his connubial bed at midnight. The film was dismissed from serious consideration by non-Italians, who didn't believe that the events depicted could have taken place, and by Italians (to judge from many derisive outbreaks in the audience) who were nervously afraid that they might have. It would be interesting to see *Il Demonio* in Naples, for instance, where the presentness of the past is more familiar to all and where the audience would not be inclined to treat as a joke the less violent curiosities of the film, such as the rural wedding ceremony. I'm not troubled by the possibility that Rondi's film was a "fiction." The here-and-now boys tell us that a primary function of film is to show us how people relate to each other. One way they've related, time out of mind, is by expelling from their midst, with barbarous initiations, those who fail to stay put in the common dimen-

[2] I'd like to acknowledge my debt to Jay Leyda's *Kino* for having alerted me to the probability that this film would be a momentous discovery. So far as I know, it was heretofore unseen by any Western audience.

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sion. I was persuaded by the film; I admired its tautly edited treatment of horror, the intensive photographic style, the sparing use of cogent music.

I liked the two Spanish entries. Juan Antonio Bardem contributed a melancholy chronicle of a long-alienated, middleaging couple in a stagnant town, infused momentarily with a breath of life brought to them by a visiting French night-club dancer (played by Corinne Marchand—*Cleo*). The breath stirs them without relieving them: they indulge futile hopes of escape, they expose each other to embittered recriminations. The dancer leaves, alone; their life resumes as before. Hence the title: *Nunca Pasa Nada.* If this sensitive, constrained "chamber music" hadn't the kind of defining power which Antonioni or Bergman has bestowed on comparable situations, it was all the same a noteworthy essay on the saddest subject there is: illumination glimpsed too late. The other Spanish item was a comedy, *El Verdugo.* Luis Berlanga's preceding films have been rather labored, and too broadly acted by their principals. The improved tone exhibited in this one can safely be attributed to Italian participation: the leading player was Nino Manfredi, one of Italy's finest comics in the unobtrusive mode, and Ennio Flaiano was credited among the writers. The scenario entertains a highly sardonic premise: that the only way Jose Luis can support his Carmen in marriage *and* in a new apartment is to accept promotion from burying people to killing them. In short, he must exchange his respectable but commonplace job of undertaker's assistant for the prestige post of official executioner, which will be left open upon the retirement of his father-in-law. In the last brilliant scene, while Jose's first client, a condemned man, marches with stoical unconcern to his death, the executioner himself has to be dragged, half-fainting, supported by four guards, cajoled and soothed, on his way to the site of his new operations. "It's always like this the first time"—"You won't feel a thing, it's all over very speedily." I heard at least one cloud-cuckoo member of the press dismiss the imputation that there might be any political overtones to this film!

The Golden Fern (Zlate Kapradi—Czechoslovakia) was easily the most beautiful film shown in competition at the 24th and I hope I'm never so up-to-date as to regard beauty as a disqualifying attribute. Jiri Weiss, having read a fairy tale to his infant daughter, was moved to combine it with imagined aspects of life under the imperial regime of the Habsburgs. The resulting combination is caviar to the pragmatists. (It's worthwhile to note here, for reasons which will shortly disclose themselves, that the tale is by a contemporary Czech writer, Jan Drda, who once wrote resistance-movement scenarios.) Here's the fable in outline. A young shepherd, pressed into army service against the Turks, vows never to forget his hamadryad wife whom he had invoked from the forest by stealing a magic fern. Lesanka, the wife—named *Sylvanie* in the French subtitles—weaves an enchanted shirt

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for him, and with the help of this talisman he is rapidly promoted for his bravery in battle. Thereby he comes to the lethal notice of the general's daughter (a handsome Medusa reminiscent, especially in her preference for horses, of Strindberg's Miss Julie). For her, and secretly, but with the understanding that her influence will release him to his waiting Lesanka (Daphne? Eurydice? Penelope?), the shepherd-officer accomplishes two impossible tasks—the theft of a horse and of a necklace from the camp of the Grand Vizier. By then he has transferred his devotion to the new arbitress of his fortunes; before attempting his third mission, the theft of the Vizier's nightingale, he discards the protective shirt. He gets the nightingale but his escape miscarries. Discovered by his officers as he lies wounded, in the Turkish costume he has donned for disguise, he is sentenced for treason and in the unyielding presence of the general's daughter he is drummed and sabre-whipped from the regiment (one of many superbly edited crescendoes in the film). What's left of him gets back to his woodland home. In the closing sequence, as the camera rises slowly to the treetops, we hear him calling in vain for his Lesanka, who has been reclaimed forever by the resentful spirits of the forest.

Those in the Festival audience deprived of their prose evidently paid scant attention to the poetry with which they were asked to put up instead and were therefore no reliable witnesses to a flexibility of style that consistently enhanced every facet of the subject. The nature scenes, now real, now refracted, distilled the ancient sense of magic in forests and flowered pastures; the hero's escapades at the Vizier's camp were shot and edited with a summarizing fairy-tale economy that rightly suspended one's disbelief, yet with sufficient logic of selected detail to satisfy a degree of probability. In the absence of any other laurels for the film, Dana Smutna (the general's daughter) might have been honored, at least—if only for just *being!* Her performance was a lesson in perfect tempering: the power never insisted on, the disdain never too explicit, the promise never premature. (Apropos of nothing save the inane connective tissue of things, I find that Smutna means *sad*!) . . . Not surprisingly, I was informed that the style of this film was too traditional—by which I'm to understand it wasn't shot *a la* Godard or Resnais or Rouch? More grievously, it wasn't "relevant" . . . God give me patience, relevant to *what*? How many among us have not been near whipped to death for discarding their shirts to catch nightingales for the General's Daughter?

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE FIRST FOUR SUCCESSFUL PLAYS of the Broadway season are all English imports, three of them with English casts. The opener, given an American production, was an inept piece of conjugal conjugation called *The Irregular Verb to Love*. The genre drawing-room comedy, which, in England, had an elaborate life cycle thanks to Pinero, Jones & Co., was dragged out of the grave by Maugham, Coward, Lonsdale and the rest of the boys, injected with overdoses of naughtiness to give it a semblance of life, and then buried again. Nowadays this papier-mâché zombie is made to tread the boards once more by being pumped full of bizarreness, absurdity, and, if possible, greater sexual weirdness than it had in the last round.

In *The Irregular Verb to Love* there is the respectable wife of the Director of the London Zoo who has been jailed for a year for blowing up furrier's stores with home-made bombs, and her husband who calmly informs her upon her release that he was unfaithful but still loves her, which she takes with exemplary composure. There is their daughter, an emancipated young thing who has just divorced her husband for not consummating their marriage, but who will not tell her present lover that she is about to have his baby, because he may not love her sufficiently. Her brother, who has been bumming around Europe, comes back home with a beatnik beard and a Greek concubine whom he met in a haystack and with whom he can communicate only in sign language. All this manifest unbelievability is not even presented as farce but as supposedly high comedy. The jokes run the gamut from repartee like "The sexpot calling the kettle black!—If I were a sexpot, would I be getting alimony because my husband never made love to me?" or "To have an affair the moment my back was turned!—But it wasn't turned; it was taken away!" to aphorisms like "I suppose man's inhumanity to man begins with parental devotion." Faintly stale, and more than faintly faint.

Now the reason I dwell on this mirthless jape, directed and acted without distinction, is that the presence of two stars, Claudette Colbert and Cyril Ritchard, and the absence of discrimination in New York's newspaper reviewers elicited a set of notices which, though not altogether favorable, by no means indicated that the play was laughless, mindless, pointless, and inhuman. Lured by two big names and insufficiently discouraged by the reviews, large audiences are seduced into conjugating this *Verb* instead of declining it, and sit there—as on the night I attended—barely able to squeeze out an occasional, forlorn laugh. It is a profoundly unfunny state of affairs when the world's

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largest metropolis cannot find half a dozen men to pronounce on its plays who can call a spade a spade and a dud a dud, who could rid Broadway of such obvious deadwood and make room for the living.

Next came *The Rehearsal,* by Jean Anouilh, as translated by Pamela Hansford Johnson and Kitty Black, in its London production but with a different English cast. In French, this is one of Anouilh's best plays, and was originally staged at the Théâtre Marivaux—appropriately enough, since it concerns a group of decadent twentieth-century aristocrats rehearsing a play by Marivaux for the amusement of next week's dinner guests, while performing the ghastly drama which is their life and which just barely manages to amuse them. As played by Barrault and his company, this was memorable theatre. How a brave, lovely, innocent girl is destroyed by the elegant and cruel artifice, the genteel and sophisticated viciousness of a jaded society, has been Anouilh's theme more than once. But here, against the background of the play within the play which echoes, underlines, anticipates, winds itself in and out of the events of the play proper, Anouilh has created a cat-and-mouse tale the more horrible because, shockingly, the mouse is all alone in a world of cats who kill with predatoriness, with cattiness, and even with kindness. And if the mouse escapes with her life, though irreparably mauled, and even if the blackest tomcat dies an expiatory death, this does nothing to mitigate the horror of all those other cats going on, as if nothing had happened, with their lives of charming, gracious, utterly ruthless *marivaudage.*

Though lacking the precision of the original—notably in its grammar—the translation is serviceable enough. But what else is? Peter Coe's direction is unfailingly heavy-handed and banal: scene after scene is played *at* the audience, and speech upon speech is made aggressively overemphatic. One of the main points of *The Rehearsal* is lost: that these carborundum-hearted aristocrats can hurt and destroy even while playing with velvet paws, and that the epigram is the shortest distance between style and the stiletto. Coe is not helped by his actors, either. That Keith Michell should be a much employed classical leading man in England can have no natural causes; he makes the Count not into the one redeemable character he should be, spoiled but at least not rotten; rather, he turns him into a brat and a boor, who, moreover, is always quite literally leading with his chin. The nobleman drunk with his own rhetoric becomes a punchdrunk prizefighter; at best, he mistakes oiliness for polish. True suavity is lacking also from the rest of the cast, and Alan Badel, a good realistic heavy, makes a ludicrous tragic villain. (One thinks with regret of what Jean Servais and, after him, Jacques Dacqmine were able to do with this part.) Only Coral Browne, as the Countess, brings off a well-rounded and meaningful performance, though even this is not free from a slight odor of fishwifery. The very sets and costumes are merely adequate, which in a work full of precarious and exquisite balances is simply not good enough.

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With John Osborne's *Luther,* quite the opposite obtains. Here the production is highly proficient in almost every detail, but the play itself is hollow. Hollow and shallow, to be exact. What Osborne has tried to do is to write a genuine English Brechtian play, modeling himself largely on *Galileo* (which, probably, is not one of Brecht's best works and certainly not one of the best models), but he has produced only a brazen simulacrum. It is hollow in the sense that Osborne's Martin Luther is not a complex, rousing, captivating, charismatic leader: underneath Albert Finney's stinging performance there is only a neurotic mishandled by his father, tortured by inadequate bowel movements, obsessed by images of defecation with which he torments himself and others. No doubt all this was so, and the porcine, constipated, scatological Luther assuredly did exist. But no less assuredly there must have been more to him.

Two factors contribute largely to the hollowness of the protagonist. One is that Osborne tried very carefully to stick to historical data and put together the preponderant part of Luther's speeches out of the reformer's actual preserved utterances. But here several difficulties arise: not enough intimate material by and about Luther is recorded, what there is does not necessarily provide suitable speeches and incidents for a play, and Osborne's selections from the available sources are not always the most judicious. How, for instance, in a Freudianly oriented play, can one omit Luther's public proclamation that his first and foremost reason for taking a wife was that it would please his father? Above all, dramatic and verbal invention is mandatory even in a historical play; Brecht, for that matter, had no compunction about making up all but a few basic facts of the Galileo story.

The other reason for this hollowness is Osborne's insistence on making something negative, doubting, unsure under the arrogance, the key to Luther's revolt. Even if that were all there was to it—and I cannot help feeling that this rebellion without cause, or nearly, is more characteristic of Osborne than of Luther—it does not make for strong drama or a convex, alive hero. The very father-son conflict in *Luther* is not commandingly developed, yet that is the farthest Osborne sticks his nose into Lutherian nosography.[1]

As for the shallowness, it stems from Osborne's inability to make the people, places, and issues come to life. Since Brecht is the model, where is the portrait of an age (real or imaginary, it matters not) that we get in *Mother Courage;* where is the dramatic pot running over with hot, bubbling incidents, minor characters, curious inventions? What could be more schematic and stolidly conceived than Osborne's Knight who is supposed to convey Luther's betrayal of the peasants; what could be

[1] It is a sad comment on Osborne's play that even such a relatively clumsy book as Erik H. Erikson's *Young Man Luther* makes Luther more interesting, and that a mere short poem such as W. S. Merwin's "Luther" leaves a livelier image in the mind.

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more perfunctory and unintegrated than the sudden emergence and disappearance of a Mrs. Luther?

But, of course, this is Osborne's weakness: he writes dazzlingly about single characters who fulminate in deprecation and imprecation, who can scorch and blast a whole human landscape with their tirades; but when it comes to interrelating characters, presenting complementary or conflicting views with equal vivacity and conviction, Osborne's powers flag. The one strong exception is the second act of *George Dillon,* but one does not know to what extent this achievement is owed to Osborne's collaborator on that play, Anthony Creighton.

Within these limits, though, *Luther* is still a vigorous, splashy, perfervid piece of theatre, if only for secondary reasons: Tony Richardson's resourcefully and relentlessly forward-thrusting direction, Albert Finney's boldly sculptured Luther compensating with winning idiosyncrasy for the lack of individuality in the writing, efficient supporting performances among which John Moffatt's Cajetan is *primus inter pares,* Jocelyn Herbert's simple but suitable scenery, and John Addison's finely integrated music.

Another English import, however, manages to combine a decent play with a superlative production; this is Arnold Wesker's *Chips with Everything.* Wesker's talent has progressed hearteningly from play to play—from *The Kitchen* to *Chicken Soup with Barley* to *I'm Speaking About Jerusalem* to this new work, all—with the possible exception of *Roots*—mark not a step but a jump ahead.

Chips with Everything has a minuscule plot: it tells of how an upper-class young man, Pip, becomes an enlisted man in the RAF and insists on throwing in his lot with lower- and middle-class youths whom he manages to turn quietly against their sneering superiors in rank and caste, until these break him. They break him not by savaging and punishing him, but by slowly and sinisterly convincing him, with persistent and pliant pseudo-solicitude, that his motive is personal pride, that his refusal to become an officer is only his arrogant urge to be a two-bit (or, I should say, penny-halfpenny) saint and leader of the benighted and undiscriminating. Needless to say, the play is an allegory of how British class consciousness perpetuates itself by blandly devious means in a world where Draconic measures are no longer practicable, but where mock-tolerant absorption proves as effective as bloody repressions did formerly.

If that were all, however, the play would not be more than deserving; what makes it impressive is that it goes beyond local allegory into universal symbolism. For, as Wesker himself has stated, *Chips with Everything* is about the way society neutralizes the hand grenade which is genius, not by wrenching out its firing-pin, but by melting down the whole contraption in the heat of paternalistic, pharisaical approval. This phenomenon is as American as it is English (I stress this because a frequent objection raised here is that the play is scarcely relevant to

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our purportedly classless society). As Gerald Weales has justly noted about the United States, "Any man who lifts his voice to criticize our society today is in danger of becoming a popular idol . . . permissiveness has become our weapon against criticism. Our society, largely through the activity of the mass media, has learned to absorb any criticism by celebrating the critic."

There is still more to *Chips.* For though the play is mainly naturalistic, as Wesker's earlier plays have been, there are moments when the language slowly becomes unreal: reduced to bare, essential phrases which do not answer any questions, but whose repetition with increasing intensity or a desperately dying fall ends up by suggesting the deserts that lie beyond the reiterated platitudes—deserts of barren isolation where the wind of words scarcely leaves even a tracery in the sand.[2] There are two such scenes between Pip, that Sancho-Panzized Don Quixote, and Charley, a quixotic, idolizing Sancho; as played by Gary Bond and Derek Fowlds, and directed by John Dexter, they are extremely hard to forget.

Dexter's staging, the entire cast in a spectacular display of ensemble acting, Jocelyn Herbert's spare, mobile, and amply suggestive décor, along with Wesker's neat device of using fanatical RAF drill as a connecting thread between scenes (besides allowing it to constitute some of the liveliest scenes themselves), infectious and wholly authentic army humor that is ready at the drop of a rifle to turn into pathos or drama, all these contribute to an evening of perhaps not great—because intellectually oversimplified—but total, and totally affecting, theatre.

In the musical field, we had Rick Besoyan's disgraceful concoction, *The Student Gypsy or The Prince of Liederkranz,* whose coördinates were idiocy and pederasty. This parody of Herbert and Romberg operettas was one long March of the Little Wooden Clichés, cruder and less funny than the things it was meant to make fun of; when it ran out of ersatz wit, it resorted to genuine faggotry. So much for The Student Pansy or The Piece of Limburger.

Here's Love is concocted of different ingredients. This hymn to Santa Claus and Universal Love, based on a, one might have supposed, happily forgotten movie, is made up of treacle, honey, brown sugar (nothing so refined as white!), jelly beans, goody-goody gumdrops, Norman Rockwell, Norman Vincent Peale. It lays, if you will forgive the misseasoned metaphor, a large, chocolate egg. It has not enough sophistication for a ten-year-old, but it is expensive, gaudy, old-fashioned, and full of Meredith Willson's verbal and musical banality—not even warmed-over *Music Man,* only leftover *Molly Brown*—and there are no performers to redeem it. But when the child on stage described her father as a reprobate, the woman behind me inquired what that word

[2] It may be that Wesker is here undergoing the influence of two fascinating young British playwrights, Ann Jellicoe and Henry Livings.

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meant; later, she expressed her approval of the show. From this I presume to generalize that *Here's Love* is to be recommended to all persons—regardless of age—whose vocabulary does not include the word "reprobate."

A vocabulary aberration of a different sort is *Spoon River,* which began as *Spoon River Anthology* but dropped the last third of its title because, as the producer announced, many intelligent and educated people were put off by the fact that they did not know the meaning of the word "anthology." Actually, a better edited title would have been *Anthology,* for a good many intelligent people must have been put off by the fact that they did know the meaning of the words "Spoon River."

To sweep the sepulchral dust off Edgar Lee Masters's "poetry" and put it on the stage where it belongs even less than on the shelf is an idea that could have occurred only to an American actor. The American actor is a species that knows nothing whatsoever about poetry, but knows what it likes: Sandburg, Stephen Vincent Benét, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and, if someone calls its attention to him, Edgar Lee Masters. (No one has yet suggested Eugene Field, Bliss Carman, or John G. Neihardt, but that, too, may come to pass.) And before you know it, you get—along with suitable interludes on the guitar—an Evening with Carl Sandburg, a Night with Edna St. Vincent Millay, or a Spoon River with or without Anthology.

In case any of you have been fortunate enough to forget what Masters's free verse reads like, here are a few representative reminders:

(Dramatic)
From the dust I life a voice of protest:
My flowering side you never saw!
Ye living ones, ye are fools indeed
Who do not know the ways of the wind.

(Lyrical)
She took my strength by minutes,
She took my life by hours,
She drained me like a fevered moon
That saps the spinning world.

(Sophisticated)
One night, in a room in the Rue de Rivoli,
I was drinking wine with a black-eyed cocotte
And the tears swam into my eyes.

(Ironic)
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
Tick, tick, tick, lite mites in a quarrel—
Faint iambics that the full breeze wakens—
But the pine trees make a symphony thereof. . . .
Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,
While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines.

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Imagine now four actors, with interludes from two folk singer-guitarists, with tricksy costume and bogus accent changes, reciting and acting out this American classic. Particularly when Joyce Van Patten is an abject vulgarian, and of the others only Charles Aidman has any real dignity (but on his shoulders rests the indignity of conceiving this adaptation). This First Melodrama Quartet labors desperately; but you cannot make an old, perfumed silk purse into anything as real even as a sow's ear.

The reviewers, naturally, ladled out the superlatives reserved for something cultural like *Spoon River.* But the public has a healthy resistance to fare like this, and, while Walter and Taubman roared in the aisles,/ refused to make a symphony thereof. Yet as I write this, advertising of the triune sort—buttering up the consumer, categorical imperatives, and cut-rate tickets—threatens to take *Spoon River* out of the soup. Well, if the audience wants to see deadly verse epitaphs deadeningly dragged onto the stage, that is no doubt the theatrical subdivision of the American way of death.

Another adaptation is the off-Broadway *Color of Darkness,* Ellen Violett's weaving of one playlet and several stories by James Purdy into an uneasy, episodic whole. Once again be it said: adaptation does not come to the rescue of a stagnant theatre. Some of Purdy's stories are very good, a few of them even make it across the footlights, but at the end of the evening one does not feel that one has seen a play. The impact is too sporadic and diffuse; a dimension is felt to be lacking, or else some impediment is clinging to the proceedings: it is a fine day and the water is inviting, and there you are swimming in your street clothes. But at least the acting is good, especially that of Doris Roberts and Ann Hegira, and a penumbra of intelligence from the adapter and director can be discerned around the dramatic eclipse.

We are continually being told by a fairly vocal minority that Ugo Betti is a major playwright; there are others who assure us that the early Betti is the real thing; lastly, there are those who blame the English versions for obscuring his merits. Of the three Betti plays I have seen prior to *Corruption in the Palace of Justice,* only *Goat Island,* with its final *coup de théâtre,* lingers in my memory, and I would be greatly interested to learn who these "most critics in Italy" are, who, according to a program note of the producers of *Corruption,* regard him "as a greater dramatic artist" than Pirandello. It may, of course, be that as a "dramatic artist" he was greater; as a playwright, he is considerably inferior.

Corruption begins promisingly, with an atmosphere of guilt and intrigue in a high court where corruption has thoroughly possessed one of the justices (but which?) and, apparently, tainted the others. Tentacular suspicion, the clamminess of culpability, and the viscous fear of being culpable are neatly evoked by the first act. But the Kafkaesque suggestiveness soon coagulates into cough syrup full of sticky philosophizing and bittersweet sentimentality. Anouilh and existentialism

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make their entrances, but an Anouilh without the verbal felicity, and the existentialism not of Sartre's drama but of Gabriel Marcel's. Nor is Betti content with propagating the thesis that evil triumphs only to find in its very triumph condign punishment; no, he must, with his customary Christering, show us supreme evil repentant at last, rather like Iago going off on a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Betti's one unquestionable though theatrically dangerous virtue, his dogged moral earnestness, loses out at the hands of a motley cast and Richard Altman's mediocre staging. The acting styles include everything from Muni Seroff's Yiddish Art Theatre at its flamboyantly tawdry worst to Maria Tucci's Methodized amateurishness. In between, there are Leonardo Cimino's B-movie plug-ugliness and David Hooks's perfect nullity trying to make itself interesting with meaningless changes of vocal pace, and as unsavory a bunch of inexpensive character actors as ever struck poses as though to strike them dead.

Another glance into the workings of justice is *A Case of Libel,* Henry Denker's adaptation of the Quentin Reynolds-Westbrook Pegler section of Louis Nizer's *My Life in Court.* The resemblance of courtroom drama to real drama is roughly that of radio's canned applause to a spontaneous ovation, but bad courtroom drama ("Well, Ab, when you win one like this, I guess you win it for everybody!") is sheer prefabrication of tinny excitement. Hardly a single stereotype of the genre has been overlooked here: there are no absentees from the roll call of platitudes which passes for dialogue. Clearly, the play was written not with a pencil but with a stencil. And to the extent that it may be a faithful transcript of what really happened, it just goes to show what an execrable dramatist life is, particularly when it picks Louis Nizer and Henry Denker for its collaborators. "We can't be hung for asking," the hero remarks at one point. Hung, no; hanged, yes.

In a very important sense, Peter Shaffer's double bill, *The Private Ear and The Public Eye,* is satisfying theatre. Because it proves that without writing a work of lasting literary merit, one can still produce something intelligent, entertaining, and, best of all, apperceptible and appreciable on all levels of audience sophistication. It is the kind of theatre that aims neither for heights nor depths, but sweeps cleanly across all members of an audience that for years now have been painfully drifting apart, and amiably reunites them. Breadth is Mr. Shaffer's dimension, and the young Englishman takes possession of it with modesty and good taste.

In *The Private Ear* a shy, innocent young man is being pushed into the seduction of a pseudo-shy, seeming-innocent young woman by his friend, a certifiably unshy non-innocent. The sexual theme, amusingly handled in itself, gains interest by mirroring the sociological. In this lower middle-class milieu the hero's atypical love of serious music and his hi-fi, the pandering friend's donjuanism, the girl's specious respectability, all become attempts, ludicrous or pathetic, to ascend socially. The funny sexual skirmish is part of the class war. It is all done with

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good humor, exemplary economy of means, and a sympathy that never strays into either sogginess or smart-aleckry. A potentially static situation is further enlivened by merrily meaningful stage business, and it is amazing how much relevant action can be got into the putting on of socks or application of underarm deodorant. The only lapse comes at the end, when the hero's cherished Puccini record has failed to seduce the girl for him; he brutally scratches it, and sits listening to the crippled music. The symbolic flourish might work in a short story; on stage, at the end of a nice, realistic little play, it rings a false note.

The Public Eye is a more ambitious affair, and though it has wonderful exuberance and ample comic invention, it does ultimately miss the mark. It cannot quite decide whether it wants to be Peter Sellers type of farcical comedy verging on dropping pants, or something more metaphysical and "absurd" in the manner of Ionesco, which leads to contradictions and eventual wobbliness. I can willingly suspend my disbelief or believe in unwilling suspenders, but I cannot do both at once. Absurdist farce is as possible as farcical absurdity, but one or the other element must predominate and set the tone.

In both plays, acting and direction are delightfully aglimmer, though occasionally exaggerated. In the first piece, Geraldine McEwan does put on her commonness rather too thickly, and in the second, both Barry Foster and Moray Watson are seduced into a burlesque swishing it up by the talented but overeager director, Peter Wood. Nonetheless, all give generous evidence of comic mastery, and Brian Bedford's lovable music-lover is, succinctly, perfect.

Importing from France, on the other hand, seems less profitable nowadays than importing from England. The Compagnie Marie Bell opened with a *Phèdre* that made mincemeat of everything, from Racine to common decency. Marie Bell, never a great actress but always a competent one, has not improved with decrepitude. Her diction is still fine, her technique accomplished but a craft rather than an art, and her *mezza voce* remains good. But when this apparition of a transvestite Halloween pumpkin—a grotesque plaster of Paris mask topped by a flaming, five-bell-alarm wig—attempts to emote, let us say to suffer, she immediately reminds us of a grinning bust of Voltaire. The voice, when elated, turns into a croak; when tearful, into a cackle. As for the movements of that heavily shrouded body, it goes the aged Bernhardt more than one better: the Divine Sarah had one wooden leg; the Demonic Marie may have one fleshly limb. The rest of the cast do their level best to reduce the long, straight, parallel lines of the alexandrine to wiggly hachure, and manage, it must be granted, to find each his individual way of being frightful. The shining exception is Danielle Volle as Aricie: lovely, dignified, her voice rich and well modulated, she is the ray of sunshine dancing on the morass.

The hero of Howard Teichmann's *A Rainy Day in Newark* is named Kodiak; everything else about the play is grizzly.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

ENTERPRISE AND ADVENTUROUSNESS are admirable things in the operation of an opera company only if they are governed by a sense for value; and this sense for what is worth doing is something the director of the New York City Opera has repeatedly shown he doesn't have—most recently with last fall's opening production of two works that were not worth doing, Stravinsky's *The Nightingale* and a staging of Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher.*

Stravinsky wrote the first act of *The Nightingale* in 1909, and the remaining two acts in 1913, when his musical language, as he says, "had been appreciably modified." It is the first act—with writing in the orchestral style of *The Firebird* and at times reminiscent of Rimsky-Korsakov, but bearing the impress of Stravinsky's mind even on what is derivative—that has what little attractive music there is in the work, principally the song of the Fisherman. But even in this act, what the Nightingale sings is arid artifice which creates no believable illusion of the singing of a living bird (nor did Patricia Brooks's labored delivery of the difficult high tessitura resemble a bird's spontaneous flow of song); and the writing in the later acts is thin and ineffective. It is doubtful whether even a brilliant stage production would give impressive effect to a work so slight in substance and dimensions; but at City Center it got only one of the company's low-budget counterfeits of brilliant stage production designed by Gordon Micunis and directed by Bliss Hebert. And it wasn't made more attractive by the drab sounds from the orchestra, the dry and occasionally straining tenor voice of Arthur Graham in the Fisherman's song, the sometimes unprecise working together of orchestra and chorus in the performance conducted by Walter Susskind.

As for *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher,* I would say the subject of Joan is one for the treatment—at once simple and monumental—it got in the great Dreyer film years ago, not for the inflated rhetoric of the Claudel text and Honegger's complementary mood and background music of the kind and quality one hears in films. The production—with Jacqueline Brookes's effective performance in the spoken title role—was skillfully designed by Will Steven Armstrong and directed by Allen Fletcher, and efficiently conducted by Leon Barzin.

One further manifestation of managerial ineptitude: The Mozart operas that the public knows well and enjoyed at City Center when they were sung in Italian—these the company has damaged in recent years by singing them in English; but Stravinsky's unfamiliar opera it presented in Russian; and on the other hand the Honegger work—

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though many in the audience understood French—it presented in English.

For its brief fall season the New York City Ballet announced no new works, but only revivals of Balanchine's *Square Dance* and *Bourrée Fantasque.* One hoped that this time Balanchine would present the charming and brilliant ensembles of *Square Dance* with the engaging music of Vivaldi and Corelli and without the square-dance-caller's calling of what the dancers did. But he is stubborn about his mistakes; and so this time again the movements of great elegance were accompanied by the appalling jingling words ("Now watch her feet go wickety-wack") that—blared out by the loud-speakers—so obtruded themselves on ears and mind as to make it almost impossible to hear the music and see the movements. The piece had Patricia Wilde again in the principal role that demands all her extraordinary strength and endurance for the sequences of movements in which she is made to look her best.

The performance of *Bourrée Fantasque* I saw had Melissa Hayden again in the romantic middle movement; but the brilliant opening movement—with its amusing details for the solo couple and fascinatingly complex sequences for the corps—provided young Mimi Paul with a new role which she carried off very well; and Arthur Mitchell also did well in a role suited to his style. As for the boisterous finale, Patricia McBride made her exciting lifts a little too violent with the concluding kicks that weren't done originally.

Mimi Paul also danced the Verdy role in *Episodes,* and surprised one with not only the clarity and force but the new dramatic point and wit of her execution of the eccentric movements. And her strong and vividly expressive Calliope in the final *Apollo* deserved the attention that none of the muses got from d'Amboise, whose idea of a god-like attitude in that situation was to sit staring up at the Second Balcony like a grim wooden Indian. In addition, Suzanne Farrell, perhaps the most impressive of the young soloists recently emerged from the corps, took over the first role in *Concerto Barocco,* bringing to it her secure fluidity, with especially beautiful results in the unending invention that holds one spellbound in the great middle movement. Patricia Neary did well in the second solo role of *Concerto Barocco* and in the Diana Adams role in *Episodes;* and her long legs made her an effective Polyhymnia in *Apollo.* And Gloria Govrin was excellent in the final Ricercare of *Episodes.*

An event of major importance was Villella's performances as the Prince in *Swan Lake,* since they were the first by a regular member of the company that brought to this role the illusion-creating physical appearance, presence, dramatic expressiveness and elegance it has called for, in vain, all these years. I saw his performance not with Verdy's Odette, but with McBride's, which was more relaxed than in

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her first try last year, and quite lovely in its flow of movement, but slight and lacking in force, like all her dancing.

Completely unexpected, therefore, was the power of McBride's dancing in the role of the girl who turns on her lover and destroys him, in Taras' new ballet, *Fantasy,* to Schubert's Fantasy Op. 103 for piano four-hands. This was another skillful Taras use of the Balanchine idiom, with a dramatic idea that worked well with the melancholy opening and closing sections of the Schubert piece, but not with the cheerfully animated middle section. The other new ballet, d'Amboise's *The Chase,* was so insignicant as to call for no comment except sympathy with Allegra Kent for the waste of her talent, and with those members of the audience who had paid their money for the originally scheduled *Apollo* and were given *The Chase* instead. (Both works, not announced in the advance prospectus, were presented in place of works originally scheduled; and it seems to me that if the company announces the season's programs in advance it should not change them except when it is compelled to by dancers' injuries or illnesses.)

I mentioned last winter my reading of a few articles by Benjamin Boretz, and the fact that even when he wrote about such familiar matters as Schubert's C-major Symphony or Beethoven's Eighth I couldn't recognize what he discussed or find it in the score. Later someone showed me a *Nation* article in which Boretz wrote that Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 "explores a remarkably wide range of associations derived from the opening sequence of proclamatory chords," and that Mozart's Piano Concerto K.491 "is [a] profound and extensive exploration of the entire range of associations that can be generated from a single idea (two notes, actually, first heard as the third and fourth notes of the opening melodic line, and later expanded to full sections side by side)"—the point of these observations being the contention that an awareness of these "unmistakable plot lines" of the works "is a minimum requirement if the music is to hold any interest for either performer or listener." My friend had been unable to find in the scores the passages in the Beethoven concerto derived from the opening sequence of proclamatory chords and the ones in the Mozart concerto derived from the third and fourth notes of the opening statement; and I couldn't find them either; so he wrote to ask Boretz to identify them, but received no reply. By now it looks to me as though the things discussed by Boretz that I couldn't find in the scores of Schubert's C-major, Beethoven's Eighth and the Beethoven and Mozart concertos exist only in the highly elaborated and impressive-sounding Boretz prose in which he uses words for the same effect, and with as little exact meaning, as Father Divine.

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Reviews

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Scotch Sours by the Isis

THE OXFORD HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE has been in existence as a project of its general editors, Bonamy Dobrée and F. P. Wilson, for more than a quarter of a century; but clothing the idea in material paper and boards has progressed only majestically. The original plan called for twelve volumes, the first two divided into two parts apiece, a grand total of 14 books. With the two volumes under review,[1] the project reaches its half-way point; of the fourteen building blocks, seven are now in place, the character of the whole structure can be in some measure estimated from what is already built, and it seems proper to preface an account of the two additions with some estimate of what has gone before and seems likely to follow.

The books already published are Volume II, both parts: *Chaucer and the 15th Century* by H. S. Bennett (1954) and *The Close of the Middle Ages* by Sir E. K. Chambers (1945); Volume III, *The Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* by C. S. Lewis (1954); Volume V, *The Earlier Seventeenth Century* by Douglas Bush, already in its second edition (1945/1962); Volume VII, *The Early Eighteenth Century,* by Bonamy Dobrée; and the two volumes under review, covering the periods 1789-1815, and the fair field known as "modern literature."[2] Perhaps the most striking thing one notices about these books is the degree of variation among them. This is not a matter of merit—at least not for the moment—but of method; C. S. Lewis writing on the 16th century and Douglas Bush writing on the early 17th are both distinguished authors, but their definitions of the task of literary history are so different that the books seem to have little common ground. One would hardly suppose them part of the same project, if one hadn't been told. Mr. Bush is elaborately bibliographical; his arrangement is prevailingly topical rather than by individual authors, and he concerns

[1] *English Literature 1789-1815* by W. L. Renwick (viii + 289 pp.), $7; and *Eight Modern Writers* by J. I. M. Stewart (viii + 704 pp.) $11; being Volumes IX and XII respectively of the Oxford History of English Literature; Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963.

[2] Since this review was written, Volume X, *English Literature 1815-1832* by Ian Jack, has been published; volumes announced but not yet out are as follows: I, Part 1, *English Literature Before the Norman Conquest* by J. C. Pope; Part 2, *Middle English Literature* by J. A. W. Bennett; IV, *The English Drama c. 1485-1642* by F. P. Wilson (I am given to understand that this volume also may be split into two parts with the dividing line at 1603); VI, *The Late 17th Century,* by James Sutherland; VIII, *The Mid-18th Century* by John Butt; and XI, *The Mid-19th Century* by Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson.

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himself with such matters as political thought, courtesy books, science and scientific writers—to all of which Mr. Lewis gives little notice. On the other hand, Mr. Lewis is critically more challenging—brilliant, impressionistic, opinionated. It is a pleasure to watch his yeasty prose foam through the pale veins of a graduate student momentarily freed from his diet of pulse and the clear stream. But if one wants to trace into the earlier period some of the special topics so lovingly followed out by Mr. Bush, it's idle to seek them in Mr. Lewis' bubbling brew. As for Bonamy Dobrée's magisterial study of the early 18th century, it follows a broadly defined middle road; critically, it is less stirring than Mr. Lewis, historically less detailed than Mr. Bush. But while it focusses on the major figures, its wide-minded vision and carefully considered judgments, its air of judicious and informed enthusiasm, make it an admirable door for the student entering upon the Age of Reason. How it will dovetail with its neighbors in the set one doesn't know; but the dividing lines seem clear and natural.

I have not myself worked with the two earlier volumes; but even as an outsider one must note the differing levels of discourse—Sir E. K. Chambers being distinctly more recondite and specialized than Mr. Bennett, though both follow much the same conservative line of literary scholarship. One notes also a real haziness about the division, whereby Malory, the lyric, the carol, and the ballad fall to Mr. Chambers, while Mr. Bennett has a chapter on 15th century verse (including the lyric, the carol, and the ballad) and a chapter on 15th century prose (including a brief account of Malory).

On the whole, then, looking at the record up to now, it is hard to avoid the impression that the project amounts rather to a set of separate books in similar covers than to a coherent and articulated history of English literature. Though probably a Bad Idea, this may very well turn out to have been a Good Thing; no plan could be worth the straitjacketing of Mr. Lewis or Mr. Bush, if that were possible or even thinkable. Yet the disarray of the series is getting very noticeable; and this must be the problem uppermost in our minds as the Oxford History crosses for the first time into that age, so strange and so familiar, which Yeats in an Arnoldian mood titled "The Nineteenth Century and After."

Difficulties confront us immediately. Professor Renwick, Emeritus of Edinburgh, has been asked to operate far from his accustomed area of Spenser and the Renaissance; but he is given a bare 25 years to work in (1789-1815). The period is curiously bounded by two important dates in French history, and if their limits are strictly observed, Southey and Byron and Scott and Burke and Burns and Landor and Hazlitt and Coleridge and Miss Austen and Shelley himself will all be reduced to headless or legless torsos.[3] On the other hand, Mr. Stewart, best

[3] As a matter of fact, three of the above figures are not treated at all in Mr. Renwick's volume; three are treated more or less fully; and four are sort of treated,

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known hitherto as an author of detective stories (under the pseudonym of Michael Inness), is being asked to cover almost a full century of literary history crowded far beyond any equivalent period in the history of the culture. Understandably daunted by this prospect, he has chosen to limit himself to a few major authors, and the volume which was originally announced as "Modern Literature" appears among us as "Eight Modern Writers." But what now is going to happen, in this history of English literature, to W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot and E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf and Joyce Cary and F. M. Ford and J. M. Synge and Dylan Thomas and Edward Thomas and A. E. Housman and Katharine Mansfield and Aldous Huxley and so on and so on? Will Gerard Manley Hopkins ever get mentioned, and if so, will it be among the Mid-Victorians—though his poems were not published till 1918? It is hard not to suspect in this multiplying disorder an abdication of the very idea of history.

Professor Renwick's volume opens on a minor key, with three chapters titled "The Destiny of Nations," "The Face of the Earth," and "Views of Men, Manners, and Society." They deal respectively with political controversy and theory, with books of scientific flavor and of travel, and with prose fiction. For the most part, we are among frankly minor figures here, rising only at the end of the third chapter to Miss Jane Austen; and this is a good place to adjust oneself to Mr. Renwick's allusive style and loosely hung sentences. His text does not bother with biographical facts, but relegates them to some rather abrupt footnotes,[4] of which the following are samples:

> 1782-1824. Born in Dublin; educated at Trinity College; B. A. 1800. Clergyman and schoolmaster with no great success.

So much for him. Or, more approvingly:

> 1753-1821. *Née* Simpson; born near Bury St. Edmunds. Left home at 18, and married an actor 1772, who died 1779. Actress till about 1790; thereafter lived in London by writing. A pretty, respectable woman, and a devout Catholic.

Though unimpeded by these graceless details, the text itself is often felt to make slow and tortured progress over a rubble of subordinate clauses and interjections, a snarl of abstract vocabulary, and the loops and whorls caused by relative pronouns at a far remove from their

getting a little more than passing mention but a good deal less than full discussion. Sometimes it is indicated that they will be treated more fully elsewhere, sometimes it is not. If one wanted to learn about a particular figure, what reader could tell whether to pick up Mr. Renwick or one of his neighbors?

[4] Sydney Smith, occurring in two contexts, gets *two* such biographical notes (pp. 34 and 201); the first one lets him live three years longer than the second note (following nature) allots him. This is only one of many sorry blotches, errors, and inconsistencies of which the usually meticulous Clarendon Press has allowed its authors to be guilty in these volumes. Really, when the Yankees lose the World Series, the South develops a Republican Party, and the Clarendon Press produces slovenly work, things are tottering on their foundations.

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antecedents. I think there is no sentence which cannot ultimately be unwound; but there are quite a few which sidle up to their central idea so slyly as to be a real burden to the reader.

> Edward Tighe, Esq., no doubt exemplifies amateurism rather than either agriculture or poetry in his Latin poem on the Cultivation of Broccoli partly translated in *Phytologia,* but on the scientists' side Robert John Thornton, Darwin's disciple and an expositor of Linnaeus, adorned his unlucky *British Flora* with poetic quotations and with specially commissioned poems—though he was less fortunate with his poets than with his artists—and, on the side of the poets, such names as Crabbe and Tennyson, not to mention Wordsworth himself and some modern poets, can be cited as keen field observers.

In a context where the point was sharply defined, this flaccid sentence might pass; in fact, it's no clearer on Mr. Renwick's page than it is here.

But the proof of this, as of any literary history, lies in its handling of the major figures; our author passes the Jane Austen test pretty well, and gets excellent marks on George Crabbe; what will he do with William Blake? The answer, I'm afraid, must be that he funks Blake entirely. He cites *in toto* four lines of Blake's poetry, with the aim of showing that two of them are empty rhetoric. I do not find an assertion, or for that matter an implication, that Blake was a great poet or a good poet or the prophet of a vision which has meaning for anyone but himself. No reader of the Oxford History will pick up a copy of Blake as a result of this appreciation. He might well pick up the comfortable Sam Rogers or a novel by Mrs. Inchbald, but anything beyond the bare names of poems called "Milton" and "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" will be hidden from him. The very existence of poems titled "London" and "The Garden of Love" and "The Tiger" is passed over in silence; and the only characteristic of Blake's poetry which is discussed at length is its obscurity and privacy. This is not a criticism which makes the reader free of English literature in its heights and depths. It is as if Mr. Lewis not only preferred his drab poets over Sidney and Spenser but tried to obscure *The Faerie Queene* and *Astrophel* in order to render Sidney and Spenser properly drab too.

Remains only to see what can be redeemed with Wordsworth and Coleridge; and this recouping is not in fact negligible. Theorists will not be in any way happy with Mr. Renwick's reduction of the "new school's" principles to an interest in concrete rather than abstract or general terminology (p. 154); his own volume supplies ample evidence to subvert this generalization. But the long chapter on Wordsworth and Coleridge in their actual writings is the best thing in the book. It does not get familiar to the point of intimacy with particular poems; it emphasizes traditional and continuing, rather than revolutionary aspects of the men; and one is rarely startled with fresh insights or

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unanticipated judgments. Yet the descriptions are lucid and the appreciations generous; for all its conservatism, the chapter provides no bad foundation on which to build a just view of the poets. But an apparent bibliographical oversight suggests that Mr. Renwick's real authorities are so remote as to have slipped a bit even from his reach. He refers us to "the old ways of J. C. Shairp (1819-1885) and William Veitch, who found Wordsworth in the hills as well as the libraries" (p. 288). A check of the bibliographies yields no William Veitch who ever wrote a word on Wordsworth; Mr. Renwick no doubt has in mind John Veitch, who in 1887 contributed a fine essay to #8 of the Transactions of the Wordsworth Society. The author of a single article, so distant as to have misplaced his first name in the mind of his only memorialist (or alternatively so obscure as to have left no mark at all in the bibliographies), is not likely to prove a potent present influence.

Though cramped by its dimensions, arch-conservative in its views, and limited in its critical horizons, Mr. Renwick's volume is an authentic piece of literary history, which before we are through with it has earned our considerable respect. But the final volume of the series, by Mr. J. I. M. Stewart, is only to be described frankly as a literary disaster. These words are not spoken lightly; the book is a disgrace to the series within which it appears and a parody of the art it claims to practice. The only question it raises is that classic query which haunts the flop Broadway show—why couldn't the editors see from the first that they had a turkey?

Eight Modern Writers is a book dealing with Hardy, James, Shaw, Conrad, Kipling, Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence. The arrangement is by author, and within the individual author, less strictly chronological. A preliminary qualm may be felt when it is noted that the discussion of Kipling occupies twenty pages more than the account of either James or Conrad. But it is less disproportion than the quality of the actual analysis which strikes a chill to the heart. In the first place, Mr. Stewart has fatally elected to summarize all the plots of the novels, plays, and stories he discusses. One enters, thus, upon *The Portrait of a Lady,* say, face to face with a hideous little replica of its "story" from which every vestige of distinction or subtlety has been trimmed. And the discussion proceeds on the basis of this odious little ikon, not of the original. Thus, from the account of this particular novel, one could never surmise that James intended any sort of special splendor to surround the character of Isabel Archer. Drawn in crude outline 1/200 of life size, she comes out a pretty simple girl after all—a thoroughly conventional person, intent merely on preserving the bourgeois amenities. That this view of her character involves some conflict with that felt by the most sensitive registers in the novel itself we will never learn from Mr. Stewart. Or again, we must recall *The Wings of the Dove* for ourselves if we are to know that anything of the slightest interest happens in the course of that book to the consciousness of Kate Croy and Merton Densher. When Mr. Stewart complains that the narrative

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texture of the novel is thin, he is flying in the teeth of these fascinating sinners, in the teeth of Aunt Maud, in the teeth of a whole set of textures so rich and complicated, it's evident he hasn't really thought of looking at them.

But the book's sins against James, of which I have indicated a mere tithing, are no worse than its sins against Shaw. Mr. Stewart tries to discuss *Major Barbara* under the aspect of its character-portrayal, but as he seems not to have perceived that the play contains a broad streak of moral and social allegory, his notions of what is and what is not life-like and probable behavior are largely beside the point. Among the important critical points he makes about *Man and Superman* are these: that the 'Enry Straker and automobile jokes have dated, and that the third act is excrescent. As for what that "universal laughter" at the end is all about—not a glimmering.

In brief, Mr. Stewart displays here a small, stiff, incurious mind, largely indifferent to subtleties, shadings, and equivocations of feeling, and ideally unsuited to the writing of literary history. This does not prevent him from writing of such as Yeats and James with donnish condescension. Indeed, the note of condescension is recurrent throughout Mr. Stewart's volume. None of his authors but wrote very fine works indeed; but their flaws, and they all have flaws, make a far more convincing catalog than their virtues, and the impression is unmistakable that if they'd applied for the proper advice, none of these distressing faults need have occurred. More disturbingly, the praise and blame labels, as distributed, are woefully familiar. James is thin (a big authority for this view is the eminent critic H. G. Wells), Conrad is confused, Hardy didn't write well, Kipling was a sadist, Joyce is a pedant, an obscurantist, obscene, and a bore, Yeats's early poetry is soft and dreamy but his later poetry is hard and gem-like. These are the merest *idées reçues* of literary opinion as formulated by the unliterary; one may not be able to avoid them altogether (though it's a good idea to dodge those that are completely mistaken), but failure to reach beyond them makes for shallow criticism indeed. Mr. Stewart has a deep fondness for shallow water. Not infrequently the literary commentator invoked at the climax of a discussion to render the *mot juste,* the inclusive judgment upon an author, is Sir Max Beerbohm.

Hand in hand with superficiality goes bad taste. It is hard to imagine what Mr. Stewart is up to critically, when he says, "Certainly it will never do to write off Kipling as an artist whenever he makes us tingle"; but it's perfectly clear where the tingle-principle leads when the following verses are cited as an example of high tingle-induction (p. 227):

> Never the lotos closes, never the wild-fowl wake,
> But a soul goes out on the East Wind that died for England's sake—
> Man or woman or suckling, mother or bride or maid—
> Because on the bones of the English the English Flag is stayed.

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"Gad, sir," as Colonel Blimp would say, "there's something about those sucklings that makes you tingle like a cold shower."

But perhaps the most entertaining thing one can do with this catastrophic volume is merely to quote from it. For example:

(From a discussion of man and society in *Tess*) "And of society's disregard of what is valuable in an individual other individuals are constantly the instruments."

(From a discussion of Kipling's *Bridge-Builders*) "The effect of this flooding of the strong practical consciousness of the Englishman with this eruptive matter has something of the same effect as that curious geological vision granted to Hardy's Henry Knight as he clings to the cliff in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*."

(From an argument that one needs to know *A Vision* in order to understand Yeats's later poetry) "To what we can make of this work, whether in its first (1925) or drastically revised (1937) form, we are obliged henceforth frequently to appeal, since much that we immediately acknowledge as valuable in the later poetry contains a large admixture of matter that only some understanding of Yeats's elaborate 'system' seems to hold out any hope of rendering fully intelligible."

(From a discussion of Joyce's father) "Joyce's fiction, indeed, scarcely appears to do justice to the wit in his father."

(From an account of the first episode of *Ulysses*) "Unfortunately Stephen as an imaginative creation has been pretty well exhausted before *Ulysses* begins. Now we find ourselves ratting on him (*sic*) in a way that Joyce does not intend or control. The young man's weariness, his hauteur, his disposition to speak 'quietly,' 'coldly,' 'bitterly,' ('It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked looking-glass of a servant'), even his dislike of water and presumably of soap: all these are facets of his character bringing us up short, so that we are awkwardly unable to embark upon the broad current of sympathy which his creator—however austerely a 'realist' in profession— evidently designs as an entry into his book."

(A moment of insight regarding the last episode of *Ulysses*) "This celebrated performance takes about two hours to read, is totally without punctuation (although, for some reason, divided into eight gigantic paragraphs), and appears concerned to carry the technique of internal monologue to something near its theoretical limit."

And so the proud thousand-year pageant of English literature comes to an end, as far as the Oxford History is concerned. Mr. Stewart's book is about 6″ × 8½″ and weighs a little better than two pounds. It takes more time to read than you've got.

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ROGER SALE

The Newness of the Novel[1]

ANY YEAR that has seen the publication of *V.* and *The Favourite of the Gods* is enough ahead of most years that it need feel no embarrassment even if it produced nothing else more worthy of note than best-sellerdom for *The Group*. But instead, from three continents, news comes in, half a dozen books demanding stern attention and as many more that cannot be called a waste of time. Even better, no trends are visible, the novel remains true to itself, ranging from absurd pastiche to epic meditation, all intent on bending this miraculous form to fashion particular scenes of the strange and new. Never has a literary genre been so relevant for so large a world. Brazil, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands—these, it turns out, are places. So, perhaps stranger, is the American small college campus. It is all enough to make one crazily hope for more signs that the world is growing up.

The newest, most demanding, and most rewarding book of the quarter is João Guiminães Rosa's *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*. Years ago Alfred Knopf placed us all in his debt by publishing translations of a whole string of important European novelists. But in recent years he has drawn rather extensively on that letter of credit with such monsters as José María Gironella's *The Cypresses Believe in God* and Heimito von Doderer's *The Demons*. So it is with surprise as well as pleasure that it can be said that this newest long and humorless novel is a distinguished book.

The Devil to Pay in the Backlands is a title at once forbidding and superbly appropriate. Its hero and narrator is one Riobaldo, who sees in his gradual absorption into a band of outlaws the reason for a pact he may or may not have made with the devil. The outlaws, nominally employed by great landowners, in fact are cut off from everything save allegiance to their leaders and affection for those who ride with them. They belong to the land but it is never theirs and so they ignore it and

[1] THE DEVIL TO PAY IN THE BACKLANDS, by *João Guiminães Rosa*. Knopf. $5.95. MONTENEGRO, by *Milovan Djilas*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $5.75. THE STONE BRIDAL BED, By *Harry Mulisch*. Abelard-Schuman. $3.50. THE COLLECTOR, by *John Fowles*. Little, Brown. $4.95. GLIDE PATH, by *Arthur C. Clarke*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $4.50. THE OLD MASTERS, by *Thomas Baird*. Dutton. $4.95. THE GROUP, by *Mary McCarthy*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $5.95. THE GIRLS OF SLENDER MEANS, by *Muriel Spark*. Knopf. $3.95. THE GARDEN, by *Yves Berger*. Braziller. $4.00. THE BENEFACTOR, by *Susan Sontag*. Farrar, Straus. $4.50. CAUSE FOR WONDER, by *Wright Morris*. Atheneum. $4.50. THE MANIAC RESPONSIBLE, by *Robert Gover*. Grove. $4.50. IDIOTS FIRST, by *Bernard Malamud*. Farrar, Straus. $4.50. THE JOURNEY AND THE PITY, by *Pawel Mayewski*. Scribners. $3.50. SECONDS, by *David Ely*. Pantheon. $3.95. CONFUSIONS, by *Jack Ludwig*. New York Graphic Society. $4.95.

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abuse its few inhabitants, wandering, growing hard, shifting loyalties, and seeking revenge for wrongs they barely remember or never knew. Like almost anyone not in a book who thinks about the devil, Riobaldo is never certain he exists and so his epithets for him range from "he who is not" to "he who is as close as God is far away." He is sure, however, that he called on the devil for help when he decided to become an outlaw leader and hunt down an ancient enemy. No answer comes, to be sure, but Riobaldo does grow apart from his one friend and he does achieve his revenge in a long, bloody, boring battle. Then, just as he is about to ride into the sunset after his promised bride, comes a surprise that makes the whole book ring; it is one of those rare narrative switches that is both just and a real shock.

The whole timbre of the novel resembles that of *Beowulf*—here too cruelty is combined with tenderness, knowledge of God with a certainty that the devil will win, episodic storytelling with subtle organization. Each step in the story is like the one before, yet with each Ribaldo shifts his definition of the band, his friends, and his understanding of his relation to them. And the talk about the devil is wonderful. Guiminães Rosa does not once patronize Riobaldo for his "superstitions," yet neither does he seem mystically inclined in ways impossible to deal with. Instead the devil is always there, in the book, on the plains, by the fires, filling the long lonely silences. Riobaldo's lyric grasp of each moment and Guiminães Rosa's grasp of the whole obviate the ordinary need for story and so, in a way that should make the most self-conscious experimenter envious, everything ought to be familiar but almost nothing ever is.

One's ignorance and guilt caused by ignorance make it easy and tempting to equate Brazil with Guiminães Rosa's vision of it, but with a novel as good as this the task of talking about national voices can be safely left to the nationals. This is almost as true of Milovan Djilas and Yugoslavia, though by now Djilas has just about made his homeland recognizable. He is not really a novelist, he says the countryside was beautiful in the spring but never shows the beauty. Yet Djilas is far too intelligent and brave a man to hurl slabs of anguished nationalism on the page or to build a fictional framework that will collapse at the slightest touch of authorial passion. If he cannot imagine a world, he can and does tell the truth about the one he knows by making a history of it. *Montenegro* is three episodes in the death of that country and the subsequent birth of the realized Serb idea of Yugoslavia. What Djilas sees is a country, created simply as a buffer between Austria-Hungary and the Moslems, that paradoxically was filled with tall, lofty, patriotic men. The Montenegrins zealously love their country, yet see it is wrong because anomalous. But they cannot see what Djilas sees, that occupation by the Austrians is almost a necessary step in the process of dissolution and birth. Thus, in the central episode, a Montenegrin political prisoner is offered freedom in

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exchange for betrayal. The Austrian official who makes the offer insists that one hanging is irrelevant to the Serb idea of unification because that idea has passed from the control of the dreamers to the more practical hands of the merchants and bureaucrats. The prisoner knows this to be true, yet he is a Montenegrin still and so incapable of lying except for a cause in which he believes, and the only cause he can understand is Serbian and not Austrian. His tragedy, and that of his country, is that both were caught in a history they had no way of comprehending. *Montenegro* is a massive book that succeeds only in a massive way, but the success is clearly there. Halfway between philosophy of history and melodramatic nationalism, it abjures both and uses both in order to make tragic history of a rare kind.

After such austere visions and strange lands, forgiveness comes in the form of books whose ways are more familiar. Harry Mulisch, a Dutchman, has written a curious, wry, and thoughtful novel, *The Stone Bridal Bed,* about an American flyer who helped bomb Dresden in 1945 and who returns to that city ten years later to attend a Communist congress. We are brought closer to home by the ubiquitous European absorption in the last war and by an interweaving of past and present similar to that of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *The Tin Drum.* Yet nothing creates home as surely as does good prose, and Mulisch is a fine writer apparently blessed in Adrienne Dixon with a superlative translator. *The Stone Bridal Bed,* thus, is that rare thing, a quotable foreign novel:

> He thought, there are two histories. With a sense of discovery he pulled up his legs, closing his eyes. On his face he felt the silent sun. He thought, one is the history of the *spirit,* bloody but spiritual, with a purpose and results: Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon—Battle of Marathon, Battle of Dresden, Bombardment of Berlin, Hamburg. That is time, evolution. But beside it, under it, there is anti-history in the stillness of death, and at certain intervals history sinks away in it. At such times the anti-history of Mao Dun Tanhu, Attila, Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Hitler prevails. Then there is no more thought, no purpose, no result—only nothingness. There is no lapse of time between the massacres of the Huns and the concentration camps of Hitler. They lie side by side at the bottom of eternity. He thought, *and there lies Dresden.* Massacre of Aquilea, Massacre of Auschwitz—Massacre of Dresden. We smashed up Dresden because it was Dresden, just as the Jews were slaughtered because they were Jews. No further message. Hecatombs dedicated to nothingness, burning in an eternal, dead space outside history. How *beautiful!* The bombing of Dresden belongs to Hitler, and to Attila, and to Tamerlane; I was for *one* night with the Waffen S.S., one night an armed horseman in the barbarians' army, unfamiliar with the rules of life *li* and *i* and in the steppe of the sky!

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But the idea is not allowed to stand by and for itself. Because the flier is a part of both histories, he wanders through Dresden, cruelly trying to probe the pasts of the two Germans who are kind to him, seeking forgiveness as well as assurance that they are as guilty as he. This is a beautifully done book, evidence that the future for the novel of ideas is both considerable and unlike its past.

Closer to home still are three fine entertainments, two English and one American. In the first, Arthur C. Clarke abandons the future to document the stiff upper lipped history of a young RAF officer attached to a group assigned to make radar a useful device in the landing of airplanes. *Glide Path* has all Clarke's simple and almost uncanny ability to make the group efforts of scientists and technicians seem like human activity. Furthermore he can make Getting Things Done a part of war without indulging in the technician novel's usual swagger to the effect that it is the news behind the news. The other English entertainment, John Fowles' *The Collector,* does have some swagger. It is a melodrama about a young man who uses a fortune won in a football pool to kidnap a young art student and keep her hidden in a country cottage. Fowles seems to want to make the kidnapper's desire to hold on to the girl without touching her a sure sign of the empty possessiveness of the petit bourgeois. Worse, he seems to believe that his art student, who bleats about freedom and really living, is not a great bore but a fresh young bird whose wings are being clipped. But this is really irrelevant; what counts is the quite exciting telling of the curious embrace of the two as they careen towards disaster. Third, lightest, and best, is Thomas Baird's *The Old Masters,* all about the sale of a Watteau that may or may not have been forged. The easiest way to indicate its kind and quality is to say that Baird can move from a perfectly standard type, like the Greek millionaire who needs the painting to make a French dame his mistress, to a more original type, a Negro homosexual named Thackeray, without a shift in narrative focus or a slip in the bright dialogue. All in all, these three novels help considerably to cheer up that part of the mind that wonders about the decline of the rental library.

Such cheering up, too, is sorely needed, for when we come to that part of home called Fashion, the good news begins to stop. One curious fact about Fashion, though, is worth noting—a kind of double ventriloquism that makes two books by apparently different authors turn out to be the same book. Here, for instance, are two passages written by The Middle-Aged Lady:

> And it was true that the tale of her nursing had spread far and wide: everybody and his brother in this wing of the hospital seemed to have heard that poor little Mrs. Crockett, a chestless wonder, was breast-feeding; outside, in the Cosmopolitan Club, her mother's circle was all talking about it.

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> Nicholas had decided to do everything nice for Jane, except sleep with her, in the interests of two projects: the publication of his book and his infiltration of the May of Teck Club in general and Selina in particular.

The pedantic reader, if forced to prove the unlikely fact that these were written by different writers, might say the first was American and the second English because the latter uses the colon more exactly and has the more refinedly named club. The pedant would seem, too, to be right, for the first is from *The Group,* with Mary McCarthy's name on the title page, and the second is from *The Girls of Slender Means,* by Muriel Spark. But the bored, detached tone caught so well in both and so obviously betrayed by a titillated fascination with the female body —that is exactly the same. So too is the insult they offer to the spirit of even the pedantic reader.

Another Siamese is the Young Writer of the Interminable Short Novel. Here there is missing the sameness of manner; one, after all, is Faulkner translated into French and back again (Yves Berger, *The Garden*) and the other is Europeanized American (Susan Sontag, *The Benefactor*). But they share a marked ability for coagulating cliches so that five pages seems like a long read. Here is Miss Sontag, using what John Wain has brilliantly seen is translator's English:

> "Then we can be happy. I feel it. Don't you?" I shook my head. She sat upright suddenly, looked at me sharply, and then buried her face in her hands.
>
> I stroked her back, and spoke as gently as I could. "Don't suffer, my dear one. I cannot yet be reconciled to happiness. A futile irony has me by the throat. It invades my dreams. It drives me to terrible, useless acts. It makes me take myself too seriously, and ends by preventing me from taking anyone else seriously—except the accomplices and mentors of my dreams.

Here is M. Berger, the speaker an Avignon landowner:

> Vain harvests . . . when you have gathered them into the barns which are inside you, think of nothing; then you find lined up beside you the motionless crows that are words and when your memory and your hand open, they fly away in a flurry of wings and meanings. You are left with a few feathers, and also the bodies of those who are shamming death and in the fever of the hunt you fail to see that you lack the essential, the full and unique significance which words assumed in Virginia about 1842 when they inhabited things, and men, as a result of beating the woods and following the flight of the eagle, steeped themselves at the same time in the vision and the meaning of things . . .

The sentence is two hundreds words from its end, but this much is

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enough to show that the nothingness that results from a Sartrified sense of the absurd and the nostalgia that results from a Faulknerian awareness of the time when words inhabited things are perilously alike and a major threat to statesmen's efforts to keep France and America apart. The path both novels take, too, from dreams to fascinated sexuality which hopes to be perverted enough to match the dreams, hardly qualifies as the road never taken.

But heartily know, when the double gods go, the gods arrive. Wright Morris has been playing the time-game for years and he has gotten good at it. Perhaps too good; *Cause for Wonder* nears its close with sentences like these, which Morris has written before:

> Circle overlapped circle, and memory proved to be the great falsifier, a cheat to which the word experience was extraction without pain. The word time accumulation without addition. Only a madman, like Dulac, would turn time endwise, bottoms-up, letting the hour-glass trickle in reverse. An illusion to displace a delusion—would he put it like that?

But Morris has always had a gift for putting cliches to work for him, and his ability to invent myths with apparent casualness has never flagged. Here are the leading characters of *Cause for Wonder:*

> My Uncle Fremont, inventor of the dustbowl, Charles Horney, inventor of the Present, Sol Spiegel of the Spiegel Salvage Empire, Katherine Brownell, and myself, Warren Howe.

Morris can go far into his novel just unravelling that sentence, and My Uncle Fremont, who "came too late for God and too early for the Farm Security Administration," and Spiegel, who collects and sells the belongings of old movie stars, are vintage Morris creations. But Morris is decanting fine new wine into bottles he has used before. His wonderfully calculated informal air, which is so exciting to the reader first discovering how much it can do, has begun to seem a little monotonous even as he is demonstrating its relevance anew. His position is like Iris Murdoch's. Both are extremely prolific writers, incapable of writing a bad book, who stand as the backbone of the novel in their respective countries. But their particular zaniness has always seemed just the thing required to produce one great novel as well as many good ones and, as yet, neither has written that novel. So, naturally but surely unfairly, even strong admirers begin to cavil.

Which is a shame, because even with the back of his hand Morris can point up the paltriness of many writers who would like to be taken seriously. As a very simple example, here is Morris:

JESUS SAVES
GREEN STAMPS

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Morris knows at at glance what must be done to signs in order to make comment on them interesting. A few years ago Richard Bissell was doing this kind of thing well. But here is Robert Gover, who made some stir last year, imagining that he can comment trenchantly on American life by reproducing the neon down the street:

GOOD NIGHT
SLEEP TIGHT
NATO STANDS WATCH
SUCH BIG VALUES! SUCH LOW PRICES!

This might be fun to do while driving home at night, but the fact that Gover seems unaware of Morris' way of dealing with this stuff (most memorable, perhaps, is what he does with WAKE BEFORE BOMB in *Ceremony at Lone Tree*) means that his excoriating efforts seem simply silly.

Bernard Malamud has not been at it as long as Morris but his present position is similar. Just as Morris in his most recent novels has moved his circus to Europe, so too Malamud seems to be trying to stay clear of Jewish New York, most notably by writing about Italy. But the four Italian stories in *Idiots First,* as well as the one academic story, show signs of self-consciousness and strain. This is from "Life is Better than Death":

> For more than a week Etta went through many torments. She felt a passionate desire to sleep with Cesare. Overnight her body became a torch. Her dreams were erotic. She saw Armando naked in bed with Laura, and in the same bed she saw herself with Cesare, clasping his small body to hers. But she resisted—prayed, confessed her most lustful thoughts, and stayed for hours at Armando's grave to calm her mind.

Malamud's trademark, the confusions of the lost, only works when the characters are not flatly understood, as Etta is here. For comparison, here is a passage from "The Death of Me," an earlier story:

> Marcus offered the man his sympathy, and thereafter when he heard the tailor whispering in the rear of the store, could always picture the wife coming back to him [the tailor] from wherever she had been, saying she was this time going to stay for good, but at night when they were in bed and he was whispering about her in the dark, she would think to herself she could never stand this thing and in the morning, was gone. And so the man's ceaseless whisper irritated Marcus; he had to leave the store to hear silence, yet he kept Emilio on because he was a fine tailor, a demon with the needle, who could sew up a perfect cuff in less time than it takes an ordinary workman to make measurements, the kind of tailor, who when you were looking for one, was very rare.

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Here the sympathy and understanding characteristic of Malamud form simply and gracefully. This is not to say that Malamud's later work is all inferior; indeed, the finest stories in the book are the recent "Idiots First" and "Black is My Favorite Color." But it is to say that as yet Malamud still has only one metier of which he is the master.

So we come all the way home from the perplexing Guiminães Rosa to the familiar worlds of Morris and Malamud, and turn for a moment to that land of the strangely recognizable called the future. The point about the future still seems to be that it is perhaps not taking place Then but Now, but the latest documentations of that case do rather better than most. Pawel Mayewski, a Pole writing in English, in *The Journey and the Pity* tries to make new the old story of a world cut off from the outside by a tangle of threats and bureaucratic proceedings. The final effort to salvage individualism is simple going, but along the way are a very funny scene of administrators deciding the implications of the death of a dog and (Miss Sontag note) a dream that is at once credible, relevant, and comprehensible—how many of those are there? David Ely's *Seconds* is a more original book, about a company that takes your wish for a second chance literally and offers to provide for your "death" and to create for you a new identity. Fortunately Ely, like Mayewski and the entertainers mentioned earlier, does not try to overplay his hand. He lets his main device provide its own comment and proceeds simply to document the story of a man who accepts his second chance and then fails to be his new self. So the last scene, in which he learns that those who fail in this way are returned to the company to provide the bodies that allow others to escape their first chance, has all its literary lights low and the grotesquerie is compelling. If John Frankenheimer takes Ely's cue he should be able to make a very fine movie of *Seconds*.

But the last word in new oldness is Jack Ludwig's *Confusions*. Recommend *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* and those who find novels frivolous or arty might read it; *Confusions,* though, is the novel-reader's novel, sure-fire, a pastiche on all academic and most Jewish novels ever written and a splendid contribution to both genres as well. Joe Galsky of Roxbury becomes Joseph Gillis of Harvard and eventually both go to teach at Royce College in California. Every scene in the book has been done before, most of them many times: the first meeting of the Department, called "Ivy League Day in the Committee Room"; the seeking out of the one or two curve balls on the faculty, called "Sisyphus: Labor to be Beautiful"; a meeting with students in "Irremedial" Writing, called "R.S.V.P. No to the Day of Judgment." Every name in all current name-kits are here, from Leavis to Reich to "Nice Kafka? Nice Bartok?":

> "Edith was in Cambridge last month, wasn't she?" he said casually.
> "Who?" I said—it's sure fire for killing off name-droppers.

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"Edith."

I looked to Rymer and Clegg for help.

"Edith," Porson repeated crankily. "Edith *Sitwell.*"

I shook my head.

"Dame Edith. Delicious *Doctor* Edith Sitwell . . . ?"

A fine rap on the shins from Nancy's Italian-point toes put an end to the gambit. Later, out of her range, my "Who?" successfully killed off drops of "Marilyn," "Wystan," "Winnie," "Bob" (Graves) and "Alf" (Whitehead).

I, meanwhile, was trying to case Royce College. Rymer I taped as the campus *floorwalker,* who could tell you where everything was; Clegg was the *campus ward heeler* who could tell you how to get it; Porson was the *campus brain-picker* who would get it from you after you got it.

If this is not for you, it is my fault, I've quoted the wrong passage. For Jack Ludwig is the first campus brain-picker ever who does not stop imagining he can have a good time with all this stuff. So instead of pretending that his is the kind of book which, after limping along with its story, decides near the end to be serious, he offers only set-pieces, one after the other. Here Joe and Nancy get ready to visit Flammand, who lives in the country and is Thoreau:

All that night, and all day Saturday, Nancy and I puzzled over our wardrobe. Nancy couldn't wear her cashmere because she didn't want to look Radcliffe; I concurred because the sweater, by Flammand's measure, didn't make her look Radcliffe enough. We each had our reasons for ditching a fashionable sheath. Then Roxbury came to the rescue.

Ma had a Jewish mother's eye for sizes, which meant that Nancy, a size 9, received presents size 16. Caught at the waist with a Village-width belt, Ma's gift dresses were perfect for the hills. Pa's proclivity for Boston wholesales provided me with a heavy pair of tweeds styled at the cuffs like plus-fours.

"Nancy couldn't wear her cashmere because she didn't want to look Radcliffe"—that is no way to talk. And of course the first person novel is usable only by the indulgent. Yet none of that matters much in the presence of that rare thing, a delighted writer. Read aloud or back-to-front *Confusions* sometimes seems as though it contains everything literary that has ever happened to anyone in this country. There's even, for Muriel Spark fans, a rather good dirty joke: "I tried to rewrite Caesar's *'veni, vidi, vici'* to Don Juan's *'vidi, vici, veni'.*" With Ludwig, ask and it shall be given.

So too with the novel, it would seem.

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F. D. REEVE

The Autobiography of a World[1]

SOMETIMES WE LESS REVIEW OUR BOOKS than are reviewed by them. The books we publish and promote are themselves commentary on us. The Russian books listed above make up a Janus-faced list. They indicate what we, the reading public, want from our publishers (so the publishers think), and they stand each of us who reads them up against the wall of public opinion.

They are not an odd lot at all. The five books very well represent the sort of selections of Russian literary materials which our publishers have been bringing out these last twenty years, especially since the announcement of the cold war and the subsequent death of Stalin. Two of the books antedate the cold war; two of the books are the work of post-war writers acceptable in Russia; one is a book unpublishable in Russia today.

It is the most unfortunate of the lot. In *The Inferno,* Francesca tells Dante, using Boethius' words, that "there is no greater pain than to recall a happy time in misery." Valeriy Tarsis' book, consisting of two long stories, "The Bluebottle" and "Red and Black," is a proposal in misery to imagine a greater and happy time: "And perhaps one day some youth would catch his breath over his book and, moved by the ideas born in Yoan's brain, would perform the great deeds which he, the last fly of a scattered swarm, had not been able to perform." But the book has nothing to propose. Like all contemporary Soviet literature, it looks to the future, in opposition to the present, for vindication of the intolerable conflicts in ordinary life. In this, it does not differ from books published in Russia. It is allegorical and philosophical, in eighteenth-century tradition. It is full of references to foreign and domestic classical authors, and its author emphasizes consciousness of literary style. But, like it or not, the world has moved on these last fifty years, out from under the conventions and the possibilities of the Twenties to the exigencies of the Sixties. Moral indignation today, especially after the ideological catastrophe of the Spanish Civil War and the polarization of world power in the Fifties, is worse than fruitless. It is beyond being silly. It is out of place. Tarsis has his protagonist-narrator write:

[1] THE BLUEBOTTLE by *Valeriy Tarsis.* Translated by *Thomas Jones* and *David Alger.* Knopf. $4.50. A PRECOCIOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY by *Yevgeny Yevtushenko.* Translated by *Andrew R. MacAndrew.* Dutton. $3.50. A MAN SURVIVES by *Vladimir Maximov.* Translated by *Anselm Hollo.* Grove Press. $2.95. THE COMPLETE ADVENTURES OF OSTAP BENDER by *Ilf and Petrov.* Consisting of the two novels THE TWELVE CHAIRS and THE GOLDEN CALF. Translated by *John H. C. Richardson.* Random House. $6.95. NERVOUS PEOPLE AND OTHER STORIES by *Mikhail Zoshchenko.* Edited, with an introduction by Hugh McLean. Translated by *Maria Gordon* and *Hugh McLean.* Pantheon Books, $5.95.

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> Once you admit in principle that it is right to kill a living creature because it is in the way of someone or something, or because someone wants to gobble it up . . .
>
> It suddenly struck him that this was exactly the way young people were brought up and trained, so that later they should kill each other on the battlefield—because, you see, the Russians and the Germans are in each other's way as are the Germans and the French, the Chinese and the Japanese, so let's all slaughter each other and no one will be in anyone's way.

We cannot even laugh. We know this, know it inside out. We feel impotent to change the structure of the world, and we demand to go on living. So we require that morality have force behind it if it is to mean anything. We have come instinctively to prefer success to merit. We believe we cannot live without police. We ignore all protest, damning it as failure because of its impotency to impose itself on us.

Judged by these our standards, Tarsis' book is not only dull but pathetically irrelevant. The pity of his indignation is that his story of the philosopher driven into the Housing Department and his story of a professor of French, a devotee of Stendhal, who finally drowns himself, amount to nothing. So what? We ask. There is no answer. The impotency is inbuilt. You can, like Dante, if you will, feel great compassion for the protagonist in these fables of miserable love, but, like Dante, you must come to judgment, and the judgment, according to the only scheme we have available to us, is harsh. We must live with ourselves: our life may be repugnant, dehumanizing, corrupting, but I do not see how a man can combat it or correct it except by irony or by intellectual inversion, neither of which Tarsis proposes. The shocking aspect of Tarsis' book is not its righteous anger—Lord knows, Tarsis and thousands of others have suffered beyond all possibility of comment by us—but its tone: the book is a semi-fictionalized quasi-autobiographical tract in eighteenth-century style patently aimed at reform. But nowadays not even "A Modest Proposal," if it be not nuclear powered, can move us one inch.

Evtushenko's revolt, as given in *A Precocious Autobiography,* is contained, as a lion is contained in a zoo. The roaring suggests ferociousness, but the most timid child is offered a close view. The barbarity of a zoo is not in the animals, of course, but in the institution of cages themselves. We animals adapt to our cages ingeniously—we get used to anything, as Raskolnikov said—and we are then always tempted to forget what instituted the cages and to celebrate our ingenuity. The fault in Rousseau's *Confessions,* Lermontov wrote, is that he read it to his friends.

Evtushenko is caged between two poses: he asserts that "poetry is not to be deceived" and that the strength of his own poetry is its "valid and genuine" optimism. His early work he repudiates as derivative when not imitative. His first book, published when he was nineteen,

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he now considers hackwork. For he has learned by experience, he suggests, what he quotes the poet Semyon Kirsanov as having told him: "Poetry, if it's genuine, . . . is an ambulance rushing to save someone."

This assumes that the validity and genuineness of the optimism are properly only socially defined. Evtushenko says that a woman told him after a reading that the poet must "look for the truth in people and store it in yourself." The game is tricky: the authority of a writer depends, of course, on popular recognition, but its source is himself. His authority is the way his understanding is presented in the uniform of his talent, to take Auden's image, how he suits the age he works in.

Evtushenko both suits and discomfits his age. He has adopted a striking posture within a sentimental context—"When I was too unhappy and lonely, the example of my friends gave me strength"—and he has been aware of the temptation to pander—"There was of course the danger of falling into rhetoric." He declared war on the Establishment, and he catered to the desires of the young and the hopeful for stridency and notoriety. The fact that thereby he himself became notorious, and especially the fact that he was touted in the West as a poet of protest, caused puritanical, middle-class Russians to disavow him and his work. A preponderant segment of poetry readers became hostile to Evtushenko for what they considered provocative writing, avant-garde posing, and a sensation-making personal life. A small group of genuine, dedicated, anti-Stalinist intellectuals felt that Evtushenko, important as he was, had substituted politics for poetry and betrayed both his own promise and the proper future of Russian poetry. Like a number of intellectuals in the West, they found that Evtushenko was turning out only inferior verse, that he had become a poetaster, and they felt that he was allowing himself to be used by the Establishment as a spokesman for the younger generation. I suspect that Evtushenko was deeply affected by this judgment. All his public triumphs could not overcome the gnawing awareness that his poetry was essentially expedient. He had haplessly to push his luck farther. That is what this "autobiography" is.

The present English version (the French version came out in *l'Express* in February and March 1963) has self-defensive footnotes where none are needed and lacks commentary which would help the reader who does not know Evtushenko's poetry or the world Evtushenko lives in. We print and acclaim Evtushenko, though most of us do not share his problems (which are real and deep) and, much worse, basically do not give a damn about them.

We have praised Evtushenko falsely. He wants to be a poet, not a diplomat. He should despise us for our special middle-class chauvinism, just as much as he despises the Stalinists for theirs. He is a good poet, after all, but who in the world will give him time or room to *be* one? We have helped turn him into such a public figure that his slightest aberration is interpreted as a judgment. We, like his opponents in

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Russia, refuse him a chance to err. How can you live if you can't be wrong? How can you write if to be wild is merely to pose?

You can, of course, write like John O'Hara or like Vladimir Maximov. Maximov's *A Man Survives* is a joke. It was published by Grove Press, which has the reputation of encouraging, if not manufacturing the "Beats." This volume is a clumsy translation by a Finn in their stable of a long story which caters to the ideology of the Establishment. The story, published in Russia in 1962, represents the effort by "conservatives" to outdo the "liberals" on what are supposedly the liberals' own grounds. It is supposed to be full of sex—"We have to do it, Galya"; "Yes, Kolya, we have to do it"—and pain—"But this agony—it's been three years I haven't been able to get out of it"—and life—"in your condition, my little dove, one just can't let oneself go like that." It is a silly fraud. The translation is very bad; in fact, it is so bad that it kills whatever story you suspect might have been there. And what was there, if you read the Russian, though it has some merit, is so strikingly a safe narrative using dangerous elements that you feel betrayed: the author has whipped up a concoction that titillates without being true. Is this something "beat"? Just because the narrator says, "You're a shit, Phonograph," and Phonograph replies, "Like everybody else"? Boy, are we all ever beat. I wish somebody would write a fake, a real fake. Be the Macpherson of our anti-Soviet world. We need the cure.

When we talk about the work of Ilf and Petrov and of Zoshchenko we are talking about classics, about first-rate literature which, without regard to its age, communicates itself to us as exigent in our age. The originals have proved, beyond the possibility of cavil, their significance and permanence. They are books which we must always keep at hand.

I, for one, regret the omission in John Richardson's translation of *The Twelve Chairs* of the dedication to Valentin Katayev, brother of one of the authors. Katayev is a fine author, is alive, is hopeful of visiting America under conditions similar to those which made Ilf and Petrov's *One-storeyed America* possible. Evgeny Katayev ("Petrov") said that his brother had first proposed the idea for *The Twelve Chairs*. In short, the original dedication reminds us of a continuity which informs our literary understanding, so why omit it? Why discard what is, indeed, permanent?

Literalness should guide us in all our translations, whether for a given example we take that to be literalness of text or literalness of spirit. In one sense or the other, all our good translations are literal. Mr. Richardson, I find, has fudged. He has only two explanatory notes in the 800-page book; comments and elucidation of people, places and events would help the non-Russian-reading reader very much. Aristophanes may be funny without notes; he is even funnier, for us, with notes. So are Ilf and Petrov. Mr. Richardson takes some of the spirit out of the novels: he translates, "He liked the spectacles from the very

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first, but his wife (this was shortly before she died) found that they made him look the very image of Milyukov, and he gave them to the man who cleaned the yard." I would suggest instead, "He liked the glasses right away, but his wife (this was shortly before her death) found that with glasses on he was the spitting image of Milyukov, and he gave the glasses to the janitor." I would add a note on Milyukov, for this is a post-revolutionary satire: why else would he get rid of the glasses? As I read the translation, I feared that not enough of the archness, of the liveliness, of the play of wit of the original would come through. The translator was *too* literal, especially in the beginning. After 100 pages or so, he has warmed up, and things go better. But the tone is just off: "Go to hell! I'm fed up with you!" is translated "Go to the devil! You make me sick!" "Vorobyaniov himself, overwhelmed, wandered off into the town park" is translated "In distraction Vorobyaninov wandered into the municipal park." Bezenchuk is called undertaker, though the Russian would suggest something like Master Mortician. If you underdo or overdo a text, you do it out of its vitality. A mistake. Everybody in the world who has a government should read this book. These are two great, modern, comic novels.

The Twelve Chairs (1928) and *The Golden Calf* (1931) are picaresque novels of the adventures of a highly skilled rogue, Ostap Bender, in the pretentious and self-contradictory world of the new, bourgeois, Soviet culture. In *The Twelve Chairs,* Vorobyaninov, an ex-marshal of nobility, learns from his dying mother-in-law that several years earlier she sewed 150,000 rubles' worth of jewelry into one of the twelve dining-room chairs. She dies, and he goes off on his chase, starting out at his former house, now a home for old women, in Stargorod. There he meets the modern Chichikov, Bender, and the adventures begin. There are many slapstick scenes and much situation comedy. Polesov, a locksmith, is out to take charge of the mechanics of the world, but his machines come to nothing:

> Viktor Mikhailovich was about to get off [the motorcycle] and make a careful inspection of his ingenious machine, but suddenly it started going backward and, having carried its maker through the same tunnel again, stopped at the starting point—right in the middle of the yard—groaned with a rumble and blew up. Viktor Mikhailovich by a miracle escaped unhurt and out of the left-over pieces of the motorcycle built, in his next burst of creative energy, a stationary motor, which looked very much indeed like a real one, but didn't work.

At the end of *The Twelve Chairs,* after the twelfth chair has been found with the jewels in it, Bender is killed by Vorobyaninov. But three years later the authors resurrected him, as Rabelais did Epistemon, and sent him out on a new plot for a million rubles. *The Golden Calf* is a sharper and broader book than *The Twelve Chairs.*

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In the first, Bender is funny, harmless, and bright. Like Chaplin's little guy, he is sympathetic. But he ends up in the second story out on his ear; that is, he gets the cash but loses his adventuresome role. The workaday world passes him by. He no longer fits. He tries to flee. He is turned back; he is unmasked. The joke is over.

The two novels use the devices of comedy with bright success. Like all great comedians, Ilf and Petrov can draw a character with few motions: "Her sagging bosom flopped languidly in her re-dyed blouse." Bender is tagged with the phrase, "The key to the apartment where the money is." The young poetaster Lyapis ("silver nitrate") is addressed as Lyapsus ("a blunder"). In the Columbus Theater, sound effects are by "Galkin, Palkin, Malkin, Chalkin, and Zalkind."

Even if the publisher would not allow an introduction, for reasons of space, I wish Mr. Richardson had insisted on including the two-page preface to *The Golden Calf*. It "explains" how Bender was revived, provides continuity, and suggests the change in outlook and tone of the second part of the adventures.

The translations of Zoshchenko's *Nervous People and Other Stories,* by Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean are conscientious and consistent. Though they not infrequently fail in literalness of spirit, they compensate in literalness of text. No barkeeper has ever said, "So get along with you, that's a good fellow," but I think we are prepared to accept such aberrations in a book which we can feel is faithful to the language of its real author. I would have preferred to find more spirit. Mr. McLean's introduction helps guide us into the stories, and his notes are apt, indeed. The book is thorough and sound, a commendable performance. Everybody ought to be reading Zoshchenko.

Zoshchenko, who died in 1958, was the greatest satirist of the first half of the twentieth century. He was clever, he was bright, he was idealistic, he was irreverent. He was a "perfect" satirist. He ignored the politics of the world and insisted on the vitality of appetite. He readily perceived the discrepancy between appetite and performance, and he had the literary skill to be removed enough to persuade us to see it, also.

This collection contains forty-seven short-short stories, three long stories, and extensive excerpts from Zoshchenko's autobiography, *Before Sunrise,* a work of which only half was ever published. Mr. McLean calls the long stories "short novels" and "novellas," the "most substantial" of which, he says, "is probably 'Michel Sinyagin' (1930), which has the range of a full-fledged novel." I happen not to share this opinion: the plot is constructed like a short story, all the events and "digressions" focussing always on the central character and on one central incident. But the point is that Zoshchenko is fairly and fully represented in this well-selected and well-edited collection. Old standbys like "Pelageya" and "The Canvas Brief Case" are here, as well as many others. We readers get a brilliant and dramatic picture of the

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subtlety of Zoshchenko's fiction and of the standards and bourgeois pretensions of his actors. Comedy has always been conspicuously successful in times when there existed a powerful literary tradition, men of literary excellence, a clear and common set of standards, and an experience of moral degeneration. All of Zoshchenko's stories depend on the dichotomy between the prevalence of old, pre-revolutionary cultural values and the effort of the newly liberated proletariat to adopt those values, in the attempt debasing both the old values and the freshly acclaimed communist ideals.

Zoshchenko is a bitter comedian, not a jokester. Ilf and Petrov are funny; Zoshchenko ridicules. Ilf and Petrov were criticized in reviews; Zoshchenko was publicly denounced. Evtushenko, also, was denounced. He was "caught" being too serious, too idealistic, too strong-willed for the tastes of the puritans and bureaucrats around him. His autobiography exposed him, subjected him to misfortune. The center and most brilliant part of the Zoshchenko collection is Zoshchenko's autobiography. Evtushenko, in his, dances in front of us as if on stage. Zoshchenko sits alone in despondency collating in humility and wisdom the fragments of his life, which he assumes is neither more nor less significant than any other man's. These brief episodes, going back from young manhood to early infancy, have that actuality and power which we find only in great art. Zoshchenko's modesty wins our sympathy unequivocally, and his anecdotes in pattern present the meaning of an age:

> It looks to me as if a shadow passes over my mother's face. Afraid to think anything, I slowly raise my hand and touch her forehead. She is dead.
>
> For some reason I have no tears. I sit motionless on my bed. Then I get up and, after waking my sisters, go to my room.
>
> "Yes, we're in his room," she says. "But don't worry. He's gone to Kronstadt for two days."
>
> "K.!" I exclaim. "I'm worried about something else. Does this mean you were with him that time?"
>
> "When?" she asks.
>
> "When I waited for you at the gate for twenty minutes."
>
> She laughs. Closes my mouth with a kiss. Says, "It was your own fault."
>
> Then I began to think about these fragments. And, recollecting them, I began to feel even greater terror than that I had felt while thinking about my childhood.
>
> It means I'm on the right track, I thought. It means that the wound is somewhere very near.

After having followed Zoshchenko's reconstruction of his life and having come to consciousness of the possible meanings and functions

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of a man, we are aware, with him, of the limitations our own pattern-making imposes. We follow him when he suggests that both the myth beyond philosophy and the dream beyond rationality may be entirely true. In anguish, Zoshchenko says that "the tragedy of human reason arises not from the high level of consciousness but from its inadequacy." Zoshchenko wrote "miniature" stories, but their scope reveals all the madness of our reason, the "matter and impertinency mix'd." They are the work of a great writer.

Tarsis is a voice crying in a desert; he lacks a style; he is hedged in by his own pessimism, his own moral defeatism. He cannot communicate. Zoshchenko, who is five years dead now, comes to us more loudly every day; he has a high, special, subtle, personal style; his private melancholy and hypochondria are, in his fiction, overcome by his consciousness of vitality, by his compassion for the vitality of others. He comes across easily and trenchantly on this side of the ocean, as if he were one of us. The story behind his stories is the autobiography of our world.

DENIS DONOGHUE

Impassioned Clay

MY OCCASION IS THE APPEARANCE OF TWO BIOGRAPHIES of Keats.[1] Miss Ward's book is, as far as I know, her first; Mr. Bate is a senior scholar of great and merited repute, an acknowledged master of late 18th and early 19th century English literature. In "East Coker" Mr. Eliot says that in the endeavour of poets "there is no competition," there is only the trying; but in the dark groves of Academe, as we painfully know, competition is the law, the condition of survival, the life of our trade. The gods have been unfair to Miss Ward, pitting her against the maturity, the earned vision of Mr. Bate; but that is the way of gods.

The story of Keats is all too familiar. When we listen to it again we demand that it be told with flair, panache, at least with a new tone in the telling; we are impatient if the words merely chart an old chronicle. The publishers of Miss Ward's book claim that it is "the first new full-scale biography in more than 25 years," but this will hardly sweeten us into approval. Miss Ward says: "In my view of Keats his

[1] JOHN KEATS, by *Aileen Ward*. Viking. $7.50. JOHN KEATS, by *Walter Jackson Bate*. Harvard. $10.00.

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greatness as a man is something distinct from, yet at the same time significantly related to, his greatness as a poet; his life was essentially a process of integrating these two aspects of his nature." This will serve until something more convincing turns up; but I have a feeling that Miss Ward wrote this book mainly because she thought it a proper book to write. The life of Keats presented itself, as Everest to mountaineers, simply "because it was there." I cannot find in her book any really new vision of Keats, any "trembling of the veil"; her view of him is standard, the current respectable orthodoxy. She reports a certain amount of new material, and I am genuinely pleased to know that the surgeon Astley Cooper in the spring of 1816 performed the first ligation of the aorta for aneurysm, but her book proceeds too equably down the middle of the road; I wish she had written it with a passionate desire to change the world.

Mr. Bate would disown such a grand claim. And yet I believe that in writing the Life of Keats he wanted to say something; namely, that even yet, men are free, they can act, they are morally responsible. In the second Chapter he speaks of "the vital discovery . . . that we are not completely the creatures of the environment in which we are placed—that we need not be imprisoned by the room where we are, by the stock responses we pick up from those about us." Later he says that "one of the values of biography, as of history, is in reminding us that men are free agents: less free, perhaps, than they themselves think they are, but far freer than our academic and rather doctrinaire approaches to them assume." Discussing Keats's lonely thought after the "Negative Capability" letter, Mr. Bate observes: "It fortunately remained free of the complete historical determinism with which the more sophisticated discourage themselves as well as others, and it never occurred to him to abandon the salutary near-truth that most paths are open to us always." This is the still point of Keats's turning world; when Mr. Bate praises the poet's imaginative strength, this is his meaning. Keats's first garden is not even a resting place:

> The mortal who has found himself in this place has only two alternatives: to "Rot on the pavement" entirely, or, by continuing to use the same restless capability of mind that has brought him here in the first place, to mount from this stark pavement.

This is the "encounter with self."

Mr. Bate's option—certified by his great master, Samuel Johnson—is wise, charitable, and humane; I dearly hope that his confidence is justified, that the limits of moral freedom are as wide as he claims and far wider than I sometimes fear. Any option is better than the "passive or self-excusing determinism" so fashionable and deadly. I would meet him upon this honestly. To chart the precise areas of freedom and determinacy in any human life is, literally, an occupation for the saint; for sanctity is that. For the moment, the argument may rest. Mr. Bate

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is devoted to that literature which—against great pressure—assumes that man is free. I share his feeling and something of his devotion. And Keats is a notable and consolatory example. He had more excuse than most poets to relapse into a self-regarding alienation: his victories are all the more remarkable, last-minute footholds, barely gained yet gained and held. This is Mr. Bate's meaning, I hope, when he speaks of Keats's moral significance; that the achievement which we try to describe in literary terms is in fact a moral achievement of the highest order; this, or nothing.

I have gone into this emphasis in some detail, not in any hope of doing it justice or clarifying Mr. Bate's humane purpose, but to suggest a focus, an urge, a "lurch of emotion" which Mr. Bate's book exhibits and Miss Ward's lacks. Mr. Bate is not using Keats to make a "point"; nothing like that. He is exhilarated by Keats's achievement, he thinks the achievement great and resonant, he wants us to recognise it and to find it an example, an encouragement. This gives his writing a degree of vigour not beyond the call of scholarship but far beyond its expected answer.

Where Mr. Bate and Miss Ward meet is in the recognition that Keats's development is intensely dramatic and that it calls for expression in dramatic terms; "the opposing self," the self grappling with circumstance, the extension of self through the assumption of testing roles, what Miss Ward calls "the great dare of self-creation," these are the recognitions to which we are invited. I am happy to assent. These terms are eminently congenial to us, partly because we read poetry nowadays under the sign of drama and are bewildered when the sign is delusive; partly also because we have been to school with Yeats's masks and G. H. Mead's roles. But I hope we will not settle down too easily into the warmth of this orthodoxy; there are many aspects of it which we have still to explore. When Yeats says, "Myself must I remake," we assume we know what he means and we take it in a debonair stride; but I have never seen the meaning disclosed in precise terms: it is a little blurred around the edges. Even when we use the term "self"—without which, these days, we would starve—we normally use it without any of the embarrassments sustained by the poor philosophers who have worried it from Hume to Wittgenstein. The answer is not, alas, that we should read a bit of philosophy in order to be better critics; our complacency goes deeper still. We scorn the rigours of precise statement because we trade on an anti-scientific bias and we know we can "get by," being genial fellows, almost poets.

Neither of the books under review is impeccable in this respect; in both I looked for a lucid footnote which would explain precisely what the leading terms mean; terms like "reality," "self," and "soul." Perhaps I want the Moon for $10. But Mr. Bate's book gives so much that it prompts us to require that it give everything, that it be the perfect biography. And it is astonishingly good. What I admire so

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much is its commitment to the facts of the case. Mr. Bate assumes that if he gives the facts, the events, in their proper sequence, adding a necessary minimum of comment, the moral significance of his great story will shine through. And of course he is right; it does. This applies also to the surrounding figures in Keats's drama, notably to men like Leigh Hunt and the marvellous Haydon; the facts speak for themselves. (Incidentally, I still think Haydon seriously underrated in the Keats story; where but in him could Keats have found, among his contemporaries, an example of the gusto, the flair, the faith, the nonchalance, *sprezzatura,* the careless dash he needed?) Mr. Bate's book is full of relevant facts, the last word, I should imagine, in this plenitude; especially in its later chapters, on Keats's terrible dying weeks. In partial contrast Miss Ward is never quite satisfied with the impact of the facts; she seems impatient to speak the language of romantic fiction:

> Among the tall men astride their powerful horses who were Keats's first image of splendour and mastery, his own father must have seemed the most magnificent.

Perhaps, perhaps. But if you start off with this kind of thing you soon find yourself eking out the poor facts with a dash of sheer romance. For instance, Miss Ward suggests that Keats's letter about Love of God and Love of Women is an expression of self-disgust brought about by his having "joined Brown on his sexual expeditions in August." This is a pretty serious suggestion: I am not in touch with all the documents, but I do not recall any evidence which would support Miss Ward. If she possesses any, she should produce it. Frankly, I do not fully trust Miss Ward's interpretations; she is too anxious to offer a show of neatness. If we wonder what caused Keats's break with Hammond and we don't really know, most of us will be content not to know; but Miss Ward must produce an answer, from any hat; in this case, a row about politics. Even when she deals with an indisputable fact, with words on the page, she is rarely content with them, they "must" mean more than they say. Cortez on his peak in Darien is fully satisfactory to most readers, but Miss Ward is restless until she can knock him down and throw him into Keats's biography; thus "Cortez standing on his peak is Keats himself on the cliff at Margate, staring at the sea and thinking 'on what will be, and what has been.' " I wish she had spent more time on the facts. She says, for instance, that Abbey's financial duplicity is "probable," but Mr. Bate, a really tough scholar, goes to work on this and shows it to be "incontestable." Again, she is not at all as informative as Mr. Bate on the impact of Hazlitt's Lectures and his *Principles of Human Action;* and as an Irishman I cannot approve her misquotation of Yeats's "Dialogue of Self and Soul."

These are details. But the crucial difference between the two books is that Mr. Bate places his facts in a much wider context of feeling. He commands all the facts we are ever likely to find, and he trusts them

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to embody a warm meaning—like a good plot in an Aristotelian tragedy—but a fact to him is an extension of his circumference of perception; the pattern is new at every moment. This is not merely a matter of his knowing more than the rest of us; though he does. Or of his having the knack of plucking the right quotation. His mind—we can put it as simply as this—is stocked with the wisdom of humane learning; while thinking of one thing, he is aware of other things, sometimes in unison, often in counterpoint. Many of his lucidities come from Johnson, some from William James, or Whitehead, or Coleridge; thus when writing of Keats's early verse before *Hyperion* he recalls Sainte-Beuve's remark that "nothing so much resembles a hollow as a swelling"; the remark is Sainte-Beuve's, but the illumination is Mr. Bate's, and the topic is renewed. He never uses another man as a crutch or a ladder; he listens to other voices, knowing that at our best we participate in a commonwealth of learning. This explains why his judgments are at once firm and humane, never eccentric, never provincial. I think he is a little unjust to Lockhart; the latter's notorious dealing with Keats has obscured the fact that he was on many occasions a really perceptive critic. But in every other case Mr. Bate's discriminations are remarkably just. Especially his account of Fanny Brawne. Miss Ward develops the old notion of Fanny as a flirt, but she has no new evidence and her reading of the old is merely conventional. Mr. Bate gives a more plausible and more humane account of Fanny than I recall in any other book; she now plays a moving role in the drama, and ceases to be either the Joan Crawford or the Sue Lyon of earlier scenarios.

I assume that these books will be read by many students; some readers will be fascinated by the day-by-day events, wondering, for instance, about the "P. Fenbank, Teignmouth" who sent Keats a sonnet and £25 to console him after the attack on *Endymion*. Others will bear this problem easily and press on to the criticism, to see what light the authors throw on the poems. Of course we must acknowledge that to the strict biographer a bad poem is just as relevant as a masterpiece; but we require that he shall know the difference. Miss Ward writes of the "Bright Star" poem in terms which make one doubt her sense of critical proportion; but we need a sturdier example, such as the "Ode to Autumn." Miss Ward speaks of this as "his most perfect and untroubled poem"; does she mean perfect *because* untroubled? Let this pass. She quotes part of the relevant letter, where Keats refers to the "Dian skies," and she says of the poem:

> It is Keats's most characteristic because most impersonal poem. The poet himself is completely lost in his images, and the images are presented as meaning simply themselves: Keats's richest utterance is the barest of metaphor.

These sentences point toward an important meaning, but the gesture

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is vague. We think we know what she means by "impersonal," but the poet is not *lost* in his images. And to talk of images presented as meaning themselves is absurd, mere confusion. I mention these points because I think I know, despite the confusion, what Miss Ward wants to say, and I approve of the meaning; but she has not worked hard enough at the saying. Mr. Bate's meaning is, I think, virtually identical, but he has driven himself harder to define it. Like Miss Ward, he describes the Ode as "one of the most nearly perfect poems in English":

> We need not be afraid of continuing to use the adjective. In its strict sense the word is peculiarly applicable: the whole is 'perfected'—carried through to completion—solely by means of the given parts; and the parts observe decorum (for no other poem of the last two centuries does the classical critical vocabulary prove so satisfying) by contributing directly to the whole, with nothing left dangling or independent. The *Ode to a Nightingale,* for example, is a less 'perfect' though a greater poem. The distinctive appeal of *To Autumn* lies not merely in the degree of resolution but in the fact that, in this short space, so many different kinds of resolution are attained.

And Mr. Bate goes on to demonstrate the attainment. He does not say the poet is lost in his images; absent from the poem, yes, in the sense that the "I" does not obtrude in its own declared right: "the poem is entirely concrete, and self-sufficient in and through its concreteness." This is splendid. It clarifies the subject, and it is also marvellously tactful: it does not browbeat the reader; Mr. Bate is happy to concede to you your own mind, he does not march in upon it and take it over. Indeed, he will not resent, I am sure, the reader's attempt to frame a few sentences for himself, to give his own sense of Keats's poem. Or of a few lines:

> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook;
> Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
> Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Self-sufficiency, yes. But I think we need to say a little more. What distinguishes these lines from much of Keats's earlier poetry is a new willingness, on his part, to commit all the feeling engaged to the hazard of the chosen images. Choosing these images, he allows them their full lives; not only that, he entrusts his meaning—his feeling—to their determination. He will not, on his own egotistical behalf, interrupt their progress; there will be no claim to a feeling greater than the facts. This is what Keats's "confidence" amounts to; that in this and a few other poems he was prepared to trust his own language. It seems to me that several allegiances run together at this point; Keats's feeling for a certain native weather, at once meteorological and moral; his feeling for the English language and for its "keeping up"; his Chatter-

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ton rather than his Milton; these, and more, together with a new faith that the terms of human life, the verifiable *things* in sensory experience, can be trusted—they may deliver misery but never absurdity, never a void. In these lines Keats acknowledges the paradox of process, that fulfilment is decay; but (since he is now prepared to choose) he says "yes" to the paradox and to time itself as the condition of our being. And to change, for the same good reason. Wallace Stevens would also say "yes," mainly because "the partaker partakes of that which changes him"; hence change is good. And Stevens's companion-poem to Keats's is *The Auroras of Autumn* and it has this:

> It is of cloud transformed
> To cloud transformed again, idly, the way
> A season changes color to no end,
>
> Except the lavishing of itself in change,
> As light changes yellow into gold and gold
> To its opal elements and fire's delight,
> Splashed wide-wise because it likes magnificence
> And the solemn pleasures of magnificent space.

What is new in Keats's "To Autumn" is a mature acknowledgement—"steady" is a key-word for the poem and for the present argument—that Earth is our element, that time and change are the air we breathe, conditions of our lives and not mere invitations to the elegiac tone. This is the "patience" in the look of Autumn.

I think Miss Ward slides too quickly through this poem. She refers to the last lines and to "the hint of darker and colder days to come," but she does not make enough of the "patience" and the significance of its achievement. Keats is not saying, "If Autumn comes, can Winter be far behind?" He is far closer to the spirit of "East Coker":

> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion
> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

Mr. Bate has his own words. The resolution seems to him one whereby, "as the mind conceives the present, the past and future are simultaneously incorporated in it, and the conception of the 'greeting spirit' thus matches, in fidelity to fact, both the unfolding promise and the laden past that are a part of the very nature of the object it is attempting to greet and to rescue into consciousness."

Mr. Bate—a last word of praise—is animated by his own fidelity to fact.

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JOSEPH BENNETT

The Moving Finger Writes[1]

W. S. MERWIN'S NEW COLLECTION, *The Moving Target,* offers a spare economy of image and idea, a spidery phrasing, a nervousness that is much too well controlled, a coldness, and a simulation of neurosis that is at once belied by the poet's logical cast of mind and rather mineral disposition. It is fashionable to place down upon a piece of paper a series of disconnected thoughts and flash images, all linked, at surface hazard, with some anguish hidden in the poet, some deep distress that finds its outpouring in non-sequences presumably selected at random. The successions of comment on reality as recollected in emotion have a confessional tone, in this fashionable style; the mode is that of *scrambled, confused autobiography, as though put in normal chronological* sequence into a computer and then sorted out into random figurations; the details must always of course be painful.

Torrents of this stuff are being written today, with this mechanical tone; it seems as if cranked out of some confessional machine. Often it becomes an unseemly display of tidy little personalities huffing and puffing themselves up to appear disturbed (since this brings grandeur); the result is that they succeed only in appearing childish; such a pet the poet or poetess is in; such a fret.

Merwin, a skilled poet, has in this book adopted the prevailing confessional tone, and thus he wishes us to consider him as being in the fashion, with his *personality* as the primary datum. The personality here is the *given;* the poet is therefore necessarily somewhat concealed by the personality. Consequently we must ask ourselves: what type of personality is here revealed? Or, since poets have so many types of personalities, what type of *mask*? Merwin is unquestionably one of our most competent younger poets; his extraordinary *A Mask for Janus* (1952) remains an important book. To one who has followed him, sometimes not without difficulty, through the books published since, it is a relief to be able to report that there is no danger here of the personality damaging the poet. Indeed, the personality is merely a device, which Merwin as poet sets up in order to knock down again.

The personality that Merwin chooses to wear in this book is a

[1] THE MOVING TARGET, by *W. S. Merwin.* Atheneum, $1.95. NOTES FROM A BOTTLE FOUND ON THE BEACH AT CARMEL, by *Evan S. Connell, Jr.* Viking, $6.00. THE NESTING GROUND, by *David Wagoner.* Indiana Univ. Press, $3.50. SPRING OF THE THIEF, by *John Logan.* Knopf, $4.00. NEW POEMS, by *Robert Graves.* Doubleday, $2.95. POEMS 2, by *Alan Dugan.* Yale Univ. Press, $3.50. AFFINITIES, by *Vernon Watkins.* New Directions, $3.50. THE MORNING SONG OF LORD ZERO, by *Conrad Aiken.* Oxford Univ. Press, $4.75. THE BEGINNING AND THE END, by *Robinson Jeffers.* Random House, $3.95. FINAL SOLUTIONS, by *Frederick Seidel.* Random House, $3.75.

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familiar one to a reader of the younger contemporary Anglo-American school: Villon intermixed with snippets of *angst;* a guilty rooting up of parents and grandparents; a remorseful childhood. Merwin does not include marital situations or major hospital surgery; nevertheless, the mode is sufficiently a current "sincere" cliché to be easily recognizable. But Merwin treats it so coldly and with such an inner distaste that his aristocracy of spirit becomes at once apparent. And so we get not just some, but quite a bit of real poetry out of this volume, with its cold elegance, its arrogant harshness; its marmoreal and haughty gloom. Merwin has the grandeur of the mausoleum. One cannot find five ordinary lines without coming on something extraordinary and good; but it is all dispersed, nothing connects; all the good stuff is scattered there impartially, inexplicably.

Evan S. Connell, Jr., has got a good seventeen pages at the beginning of his book, *Notes From a Bottle Found on the Beach at Carmel;* there are another 226 pages after this, and among them, rarely, are scattered the type of Poundian quiddities which make the first seventeen pages memorable. Mr. Connell relishes the historical quirks and culs-de-sac which illustrate sadism and torture; he has a special sympathetic vibration for the tortures suffered by condemned intellectual heretics. As one wades beyond the first seventeen pages, the repetition of bloody details becomes thudding and meaningless; he fails to tie anything together. The prophetic pretentiousness of such reiterated pronunciamentos as "I will meditate further on this" is ridiculous; fittingly, by page 175, he is willing to admit: "I cannot imagine what to say next"; as early as page 93 he has inquired: "What shall I say next?"

This does not detract from the fact that pages one through seventeen are vivid, electric and new. The mind moves quickly; the succession of horrors is fresh; there is a certain joyousness in cruelty like that of a child experimenting with the wings of butterflies and the hearts of frogs. A strange piece of reality this, valid and startling; above all inventive and not-imitated; without a beginning or end; simply seventeen pages of a dream in history, in a child's garden of Sade. Here is the *enfant terrible* of the torture gardens, wandering loose among the Nürnberg instruments. His tone is not the ironic gusts, the cold and brilliant intellectual fury of Sade; but the sensual, wistful and gracious zest of Octave Mirbeau in the China of his dreams.

With David Wagoner's *The Nesting Ground,* we come to something more familiar and honest; he lacks Connell's excitement and Merwin's dry cold flares of twisted words, but he has something old-fashioned which neither of these gentlemen put forward: a poem with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which is good all the way through.

To be so old-fashioned as to want to write an *excellent* poem is astonishing enough; to do so without falling into any of the confessional and existentialist orthodoxies is an achievement. Here at last is a good poem, "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," not just a few stabbing

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dazzling lines striking out like veins of lurid gold from a drab coal-hill:

> Here is a stairway past the whites of our eyes.
> All our distance
> Has ended in the light. We climb to the light in spirals,
> And look, between us we have come all the way,
> And it never ends
> In the ocean, the spit and image of our guided travels.
> Those are called ships. We are called lovers.
> There lie the mountains.

Wagoner has a command of *rhetoric,* that lost science, so dearly needed in contemporary poetry; the knowledge of *how to say;* the expressive skills, the skills of emphasis, of accentuation; the skills of delay and prolongation; skills of speeding up; maintaining a wavering tone to hold the reader's attention with words that are full of hooks and tentacles. Rhetoric implies movement and design, breath and speed; ornateness and simplicity by turns; it is the lost science. Those without any gift for it rule the day; and those who have it, such as Merwin, are forced to suppress it to remain fashionable. Without rhetoric, a torture garden, major hospital surgery, a death in the family, remain merely sordid, unpleasant facts; with it, they can rise to the level of persuasive discourse, which is what we have here in Wagoner's poems. The images are clear and forceful, carefully timed. The language is simple, calm; suddenly becomes ornate, hurried. There is a strong mind effectively pushing a logical progression; we sense the intellectual vigor behind the careful spacings; there is an impetus here which is purposeful and fulfilling. Be sure to read "Closing Time," "After Consulting My Yellow Pages," "Séance for Two Hands," "The Holding Place," "Offertory," "That Old Gang of Mine." Especially, read "The Satirists," "The Carcass," "The Skate's Egg." Believe it or not, they are all *poems.*

John Logan's "Monologues of the Son of Saul," from his collection *Spring of the Thief,* has the lushness of Crashaw, devious and beautiful, intricate with bloom, sudden and musical and startling, with its glowing coffin. The headlong rush of sensual intoxication, the feverish shaping of forms from the air, the lusting for the sap of language, a musical impetus which is like the dilation of nostrils—when you read all the rest of Logan's poems in this volume, you wonder how he came to birth with something as uninhibited, as heedless, as joyous as this. There is something in him of the primeval and the Lucifer-lit; the fact that his sensuous paganism exploits Christian symbolism gives an added level to his convulsions. "Monologues of the Son of Saul" is an excellent, courageous, unheeding poem; defying fashion:

> ah my God I could not taste again our ancient sweet
> yearning in the flesh, now soft as underthighs of frogs

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and thought I was already dead. . . .
and loosened on one side her gold breast
full as pears the drunken bees tremble for in the fall. She
drew down my giant skull. There, she said. There.
And I felt my fingers stir, weaving their life in my hair.

Logan has very great promise; he will fulfill it if he continues in his native vein, and ignores the conventional signposts by which, at times in the other poems in this volume, he seems to be tempted.

Some years ago, with *The White Goddess,* Robert Graves published one of the remarkable books on poetry of our time. The authenticity and evocative quality of the work, and the invented samples in it, have given to Graves, in the eyes of the less sophisticated, a prestige as a poet which is simply not justified by his poetry itself.

Moreover, in his poetry, Graves exhibits a kind of Inquisitor-like dogmatism about the kind of poetry his self-invented, synthetic system either will, or will not, allow. Much of his verse is simply intolerant obscurantist invective against other poetry not written in accordance with the catechism of his self-concocted poetic religion. A writer of thin and awkward, un-projected, *un-related* historical romances, lacking the sense or feel of their time and place—Imperial Rome is Edwardian London; the Julio-Claudians liberal Whig aristocrats seen through schoolboy readings of Tacitus—Graves remains the author of a great book: *The White Goddess,* and of the passages leading up to it in his remarkable *King Jesus.* As a poet, he is insignificant, rightly ignored during the *grande époque* of the 1920s. He was revived in the 1950s on the theory that if *The White Goddess* is an important book on poetry, then his poems must be good also.

This is not the case. His poems are pathetically thin, as awkward in their way, in their elisions and skating over of difficulties, as the historical romances, as deficient in technique and skill and *knowledge.*

Graves claims that his poems are religious; that if you do not "get" them, you are missing not the poem, but the religion; being unable to grasp it because of rationalistic or homo-erotic prejudices common to the university-educated since the beginning of Olympian times (the golden age is that before the arrival of the Greek pantheon). These heresies he lumps under the title of "Apollonian." So, if you do not like his poems, if you do not participate in their "thrill," you either do not like girls, at least not enough to exchange your life for demonic intercourse—or you are too cerebral. In *The White Goddess,* Graves makes a number of very nimble and revealing points about the *frisson,* the thrill, the shiver of certain authentic poems. He goes on in his own poetry to imply that the fact that he can recognize these shivers in other poetry gives him the power to create them in his own verse. It is a kind of romantic antiquarian beatnikism: you show you're "inside" by getting the "kicks." Here is the *best* of these attempts in this current volume:

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Her house loomed at the end of a Berkshire lane,
Tall but retired. She was expecting me; . . . . My name is Lion

The door is locked, chimneys smokeless, curtains drawn. The Lady has left a mysterious message with the gardener:

". . . . And please, you are not to communicate.
There was something else; about the need for patience."

The sun went in, a bleak wind shook the blossom,
Dust flew, the windows glared in a blank row . . .
And yet I felt, when I turned slowly away,
Her eyes boring my back, as it might be posted
Behind a curtain slit, and still in love.

A 'key' into Graves's system is provided by the shrieking clue that the man's name is "Lion." The thrill comes in the last three lines: the Lady has been really there all the time. How mysterious! If you don't "get" the thrill, you know you are obtuse, because the "Lion" [2] reference shows that a mysterious system of private religion is going on.

Yeats's private religion gave him an intellectual cohesion and a density; particularly it helped him eliminate. But Graves's religion, as practiced in his poems, doesn't work for him. The poem cited above is no "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"; there is nothing in it of the spirit which he so skillfully traced through Catullus and Welsh minstrelsy through Skelton, Shakespeare, Jonson, Blake, Keats and Coleridge.

When we reach Alan Dugan's *Poems 2* we wonder whatever induced the publisher to believe that he had here a publishable English manuscript; we wonder even more whatever induced him, what failure of the mind, to group it on his list under the heading of "Poetry." So many bad books are pouring forth under this heading from so many publishers that it may seem unfair to pick on Dugan for ridicule. But let me provide just a glimpse into one of the most admired bogs in the swamp of contemporary Pulitzer verse:

Oh I got up and went to work
and worked and came back home
and ate and talked and went to sleep.
Then I got up and went to work
and worked and came back home
from work and ate and slept.
Then I got up and went to work
and worked and came back home
and ate and watched a show and slept.
Then I got up and went to work
and worked and came back home

[2] Probably Hercules (*White Goddess,* pp. 99, 102, 108); improbably Llew Llaw Gyffes (*WG* p. 260).

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and ate steak and went to sleep.
Then I got up and went to work
and worked and came back home
and ate and fucked and went to sleep. . . .

The Yale University Press should be ashamed. The American Academy of Arts and Letters should be ashamed. The National Book Awards Committee should be ashamed. Louise Bogan and Dudley Fitts, who should know better, but who have endorsed this Pulitzer poet, should be ashamed.

Reassuringly for the intelligence, for the integrity of speech, for the preservation of the concept of *idea,* just when we have despaired of any light in the sea of mindlessness, someone like Vernon Watkins comes along and re-kindles in us the hope that somehow the spark of poetry may be perpetuated yet another brief while before the Dugans and the Pulitzers take over what is left of our language. Compare the fifteen-line excerpt quoted above with the fourteen-line one below:

Design upon this image holds the vast
Will of the sculptor no desire could speak.
There the strict outline overcame the weak
Before the face could hold the radiance cast
And let that finger gather all the Past,
Revealing at a stroke in light oblique
In muscular strength of neck and curve of cheek
The harmony of line for which all fast.

Exuberantly the kestrel rides the storm
Motionless, carved in air. It is the form
Speaking against the false forms it cast out
Whose fixed proportions still return with grace.
Athletic genius has no room for doubt
And laughs at all designs to take its place.

Mr. Watkins' sestet seems as if expressly written to comment upon Mr. Dugan's poem.

The many excellences of his volume, *Affinities,* can be little more than touched on in this space. Certainly, if one could afford to buy only one of the volumes reviewed here, this would be the one to take; it cries out for quotation at length. Watkins looks within himself for the Poundian unwobbling pivot, the Confucian Man standing by his Word. Central also to his view is the Wordsworthian concept of man standing in the midst of, refreshed by, a bucolic and benevolent Nature; his is essentially the vision, in an idyllic Northern forest, of Adam in Eden before the Fall, surrounded by brooks and the voices of birds. A Wordsworthian City, seen from London Bridge, is the Evil opposite, the dark that makes the light visible; this too is expressed in a Words-

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worthian vocabulary. Watkins likens the poet to the crane, dancing in solitary ecstasy, beside an uncomprehending mate, an unheeding world, which will not share his self-delight, she or it (the world) being engaged with "whatever trinket/ The bright-eyed jackdaw choose."

The best poems in this book seem to me to be "The Crane," "Ode to T. S. Eliot," the "Ode to Swansea," and the two poems, "To Hölderlin" and "The Childhood of Hölderlin." The classic ecstasy of the myth, simple opposites, light and dark: these are the materials out of which Watkins has made major poetry. And Integrity, Man standing by his Word:

> I must wait long to find the words I need.
> Verse tests the very marrow in the bone,
> Yet man, being once engaged by song, is freed:
> The act itself is prayer, deliberate in its speed. . . .

Conrad Aiken has always had the nebulous quality of the admitted, congratulated poet who has never written Poems; that is, the poems do not *stick,* as poems; a general impression of excellence remains, of competence and skill. Lines come out and fix themselves, but can you fasten upon a poem of his, put it in your mind, and keep it there? It all flows away, beyond the margins; it ebbs, it is lost there. You look back again in the memory, and you have nothing left. His new book, *The Morning Song of Lord Zero,* exposes this nebulous quality in giving us in retrospect poems from three earlier books, and a previously unpublished cycle written in 1916. What is wrong?

There has always been about Aiken more of the literary figure, more of the distinguished man of letters of brilliant intellect, than of the poet. He is wordy and diffuse; the words and ideas spill on and on:

> I am he
> and this I share with you
> in this perhaps alone am true
> who cannot infringe upon cannot conceive
> the arcane process by which he might believe
> or not believe or learn or know
> begin or not begin choose or not choose: who came
> without a name
> as also without intention: knows no measure
> save only that with which the umbilical cord
> provided him *tout court* of pain or pleasure. . . .

It runs on, and on, with the steady hum of an electric motor, dependable, but interminable, with no beginning, no motivation, no *act.* There is no drama, no story: the endless buzz, buzz, buzz of an Aiken poem. Yet suddenly we come up against the brilliance of an image so sharp, that we fall back breathless from contact with it; so fine, so enormous a mind, so dynamic and bitter an *intelligence:*

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look into the sea
o mother mother
where with our fanlike fins
mind begins
and intricacy begins . . .

But then the buzz takes over again.

So, there is a Poet fluttering around somewhere within this formidable, pessimistic Intellectual; the problem is still to be there when he sticks his head out for the brief moment of his cry; to be there before he goes back into the tree from which the portentous sound of sawing comes in all seasons. A book by Aiken is primarily a book of reflections, cast into the form of verse; it is not a book of poems.

In the end Aiken's poetry bears more than a little similarity to the poetry of Santayana: the head is too heavy, the intelligence is too great; the expression is too awkward; there is lacking the elasticity, the spring of the beast, the animal quality, the flexibility and alertness which make for a poet. Aiken the poet is like one of the great detached heads of science fiction, searching vainly with anxious claws for the blood-necked bodies that will bear them into reality: reality is physical; but here the mind soars, unaided, into distance and a type of aesthetic unresponse which gives a wooden and uncertain quality to what is essentially an over-rehearsed performance.

The qualities that Aiken lacks, Jeffers has; perhaps too much so: he is irresistibly and unstably poetic. The furious impetus, the flux of sexual passion, the panther-like leap: harsh nature with the limp rabbit bleeding in her claws. Yet it's good, dramatic, exciting; it does not lull us like Aiken's staid and worthy buzz. This volume, his last, *The Beginning and the End,* contains some of the best work Jeffers has produced. I would say, on the basis of it, that Jeffers' reputation might be in for a renaissance.

This is hot, sure, quick-striking, alert and virile work. We are not meandering in a library of mirrored self-complexities:

If God has been good enough to give you a poet
Then listen to him. But for God's sake let him alone until
he is dead; no prizes, no ceremony,
They kill the man. A poet is one who listens
To nature and his own heart; and if the noise of the
world grows up around him, and if he is tough enough,
He can shake off his enemies but not his friends.
That is what withered Wordsworth and muffled Tennyson, and
would have killed Keats; that is what makes
Hemingway play the fool and Faulkner forget his art.

Hard words for a soft age. Jeffers' language has passion and élan; he carries one away, but he is not supposed to have subtlety; his intellect

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is said to be of a minor order; there is that familiar hawklike *poseur.* But how about this for drama allied to intellect allied to power:

> There is no God but God; he is all that exists,
> And being alone does strangely.
> He is like an old Basque
> shepherd,
> Who was brought to California fifty years ago
> And has always been alone, he talks to himself,
> Solitude has got into his brain,
> Beautiful and terrible things come from his mind.
> God is a man of war,
> God is a great poet:
> Whom can he strike but himself?
> Whom can he praise but himself?

Jeffers is smart *enough,* when he has to be; and that animal vigor, that ear for blood and disaster, carry him along. So in the end he is a real *poet,* and Aiken is not; though there is no comparison between the quality, the subtlety of the two minds; the diversity, skillful balance and refinement of Aiken's culture make Jeffers seem a barbarian. But here is a bloody barbarian who can sing, and who has got his plow wedged deep under the edge of reality. I think this book deserves to be read.

Frederick Seidel offers us an unusual first volume, entitled *Final Solutions,* interesting, like Logan's, primarily for one long poem. "The Sickness" is an extraordinary and promising achievement, compassionate and grotesque, bitter-accurate and fantastic by turns, a Baroque blending of suffering and expressionistic elegance, delighting in the use of language. It is visiting day at Bellevue:

> The huge scarred Chinaman, a yellow boxing glove
> (His neck and head), spreads out his wife's left hand
>
> Just so, and strokes her wedding band,
> A lion lapping at a thorn
> In his own paw. . . .
> . . . Bleak grains
> Of sunlight cross the floor, as the sun leans
>
> Inside the tall barred windowscreens,
> While the river escalates downtown
> On flattening steps of foam. "I cleans
> Yo hans, I cleans you fresh blue sunshine," Chas, his brown
> And blue eyes tilting madly, sings.
> The gulls, their own white tracers, dip through spumy rings
> For rubbers, fish and rubbish. Pudgy squabs

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Peck the yard's pebbles. Each head bobs
Like a cork floater. *From these stones*
Give us our bread, Lord, each craw sobs.

A Pre-Raphaelite vision of a lovely girl in Central Park follows, only to change into *a ruined/Wax mask, waist-down a shiftless hot wind.* The language is always picked exquisitely: *those times that were sweet milk/For our pale bones, and in the clock spun silk.* A political digression, grotesquerie; a flash of sentimentality; a tough-guy utterance—*Don't play dead—die!,* and we are out of Bellevue into a rather *pataphysique* ambiance, a Jarry-esque luxury hotel dining-room; ribald fantasy takes off, with a cadenced, dancing sway to the clucking feet of the meter. This section is quite funny, quite prepared. There is a Gargantuan sexual machine, with a female victim; a screwing knife appendage that is a carefully-crafted jewel-watch of sadism; it all has a joyous, mocking air; the attention and the interest is to be focused in the *style,* the extremely clever *way* things are done and said. "Look! I am doing all this, all at once!" the poet seems to say. And it's extremely good, and comic.

Then the Servitors come in with the master-image of the honey-pot which turns into bees; this is ribald, uproarious. We are a long way from Bellevue inside a quasi-Michaux phantasmagoria; the tone has shifted from pathos and near-tragedy to admiration of the juggler who can keep all this elaborate language tossing in the air. There is an enameled, lacquered quality to it that reminds one of the good Apollinaire.

So what Seidel offers here is a dream fantasy within Baudelaire's city: uninhibited; gay and pathetic by turns; incurably and hopefully vivacious. Here is a poet who has the courage to be himself and not to follow the schools; one who has the courage to use the language in an ornate and fastuous manner; there's lots of gilding, lots of overlay; if Seidel were decorating Versailles he would be filling in the trophies above the doors with helmets and shields, lyres and lutes and sheaves of grain. A bold, imaginative poet; unafraid to be decorative and amuse while he instructs. A poet worth watching for.

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VIVIAN MERCIER

No Second Miracle[1]

IT MUST BE HARD TO FIND, in any language, works harder to translate into English verse than the tragedies of Racine and the verse comedies of Molière. Not even the poems of Mallarmé, in a sense, offer such difficulties, since the ambiguousness of English is more than a match for that of French. French classical drama presents a quite different problem, or rather problems. On the one hand there is its clarity, whose beam grows not a whit less clear when it focuses on the murk of the Unconscious. On the other hand there lies the real stumbling-block, its understatement—all the more treacherous because to an Anglo-Saxon ear it sometimes masquerades as overstatement. At first one takes all the *ravissements, ardeurs* and *supplices* at face value, but it doesn't take long to discover, through the frequency of their recurrence in comedy as well as tragedy, that these are clichés, the merest small change of conventional stage dialogue. Once this peculiarity of diction has been absorbed by the reader, he becomes conscious of the extraordinarily even tenor of the verse. Nobody can read Shakespeare for long without becoming aware of the astonishing leaps from pianissimo to fortissimo and vice versa; by comparison, French classical drama ranges from piano to forte, pausing on the way at mezzo piano and mezzo forte, and travels by the same easy stages on the way back down. Of course, I'm talking now about the words on the page, not about what a French actor can do with them in the theatre: Auden has called French classical tragedy, when acted, "Opera for the unmusical." After all, it is the words on the page that the English-speaking poets must try to translate.

And try they do. A couple of years ago there was Robert Lowell's version of *Phèdre,* of which I said in a review at the time, parodying Napoleon's famous *mot: "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas Racine."* I now realize that Lowell may have sought to capture the theatrical effect rather than the impressions of a reader, but my comparison of a passage of Lowell with a literal prose translation still makes a valid point. Phaedra is speaking to her stepson Hippolytus and in veiled phrases confessing her love for him. Lowell has her say:

> No, Phaedra would have snatched your burning torch,
> and lunged before you, reeling like a priest
> of Dionysus to distract the beast.
> I would have reached the final corridor
> a lap before you, and killed the Minotaur!

[1] TARTUFFE, by *Jean Baptiste Poquelin de Molière.* Translated into English Verse by *Richard Wilbur.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95.

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Lost in the labyrinth, and at your side,
would it have mattered, if I lived or died?

The French, however, contains no torch, no priest, no lunging or reeling, no killing of the Minotaur; translated literally, it goes like this: "Sharing the peril which you had to seek, I myself would have wished to walk ahead of you; and Phaedra, going down into the labyrinth with you, would with you have escaped or perished." Racine uses the mere repetition of "with you" to convey much that Lowell does not trust himself to get across without the help of imagery.

Molière's verse comedies present exactly the same problems to the translator as Racine's tragedies, plus one extra added distraction—the difficulty of what to do about Molière's carefully rationed but omnipresent colloquialisms. It is very hard for the modern reader to accept as the first line of a heroic couplet Richard Wilbur's

It looks to me as if you're out on a limb,

yet, once he had assumed the hero's task of producing a line-by-line verse translation of *Tartuffe,* Wilbur was almost forced to write like this at regular intervals. The French original of "you're out on a limb" is *"Vous voilà mal,"* than which nothing could be more concise or colloquial, and Wilbur has doomed himself to find an equivalent. The meter itself, of course, is partly to blame: despite its use by Robert Frost and John Shade, the heroic couplet can only be described as archaic in the twentieth century. Pope and Crabbe and Dryden used it colloquially when they wished, but not even Dryden could make the English ear accept it as a valid dramatic meter. It is noteworthy that when Wycherley, a near-contemporary of Molière, wished to adapt *Le Misanthrope* as *The Plain Dealer,* he did it in prose. The most Wilbur claims for his diction is that "at best" it "mediates between then and now, suggesting no one period." Curiously, the movement of Wilbur's verse is less relaxed than that of Lowell's, being much more frequently end-stopped; this rigidity is actually easier to accept in comedy, which the modern reader expects to be stylized, whereas Romanticism has conditioned him to expect tragedy to sound more "natural" and "sincere." At any rate, Wilbur's verse is natural to the extent that it very rarely misplaces a stress for the sake of scansion or rhyme. And he is right in claiming that a verse translation makes the long, logical speeches far more acceptable than a prose one would: "Molière's dramatic verse," he writes, "which is almost wholly free of metaphor, derives much of its richness from argumentative virtuosity."

All the above quotations come from the introduction to Wilbur's *The Misanthrope,* published in 1955 and frequently performed since. Those who read the "Critical Acclaim" for that translation quoted on the jacket of *Tartuffe* may wonder, as I did, whether the acclaim was not in fact uncritical; despite its unfailing accuracy and frequent wit,

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Wilbur's newest translation leaves me unmoved. Disappointed, I read his *Misanthrope* for the first time yesterday, and I am delighted to report that it deserves all the praise it has received—and more. I could not have believed, without reading it, that so felicitous a version was possible in English. Every year I grow more convinced that *Le Misanthrope,* like *King Lear,* is one of the tiny number of really great plays—not only profound psychological studies but genuine dramas of ideas. I had always assumed that my estimate of Molière's play must seem far-fetched to anybody who couldn't read French fairly easily, but, now that Wilbur's translation exists, no English reader has the right to be skeptical any more.

Who, then, is to blame for the unsatisfactoriness of Wilbur's *Tartuffe*? In the last analysis, I'm afraid, Molière is. *Tartuffe* contains a handful of brilliant scenes, some of the best that its author ever wrote, but—quite apart from its contrived ending—it is far from being a great play. The title character does not appear at all until after the beginning of the third act, and he almost disappears from the play after the end of the fourth, though of course his evil influence is felt in every scene where he does not appear. By contrast, Alceste is present in almost every scene of *The Misanthrope,* generating a constant intellectual excitement which makes the translator's task in one respect a relatively easy one. Alceste's viewpoint is always in conflict with that of every other character, so that no matter how unruffled the tenor of Molière's verse may be and how low the emotional temperature, drama is always present. Tartuffe, by far the most exciting character in the lesser play, is rarely present, as we have seen, but even when he is onstage he has no viewpoint, being only, as Wilbur says, "a wily opportunist." He is neither a self-deceiving religious hypocrite like Burns's Holy Willie nor a deliberate amoralist and philosophic atheist like the hero of Molière's *Dom Juan.* He doesn't wish to destroy the status quo as Alceste does but only to exploit it. Wilbur's introduction to *Tartuffe* puts forward a strong case for the fatuous Orgon, Tartuffe's benefactor, as being the most neurotic and therefore the most interesting character in the play; he may have a point there, but Orgon gets cured too quickly and becomes boring.

Nothing that I have said about Wilbur's *Tartuffe* as a reading text should discourage anyone from seeing a performance of it. I am one of what can hardly be more than a few hundred people who saw a verse translation of *Tartuffe* by the late Earl of Longford performed in Dublin more than twenty years ago. I quite enjoyed that version, but, although I never saw it in print, I am sure it was decidedly inferior to Wilbur's. The stylized production it was given in Dublin suited the play better than the heavily realistic treatment, reminiscent of the Dutch Old Masters, given it in 1956 at the Comédie Française. A stylized handling would be appropriate also for Wilbur's version. And may I add that whenever Mr. Wilbur decides to translate *L'École des femmes,* I'll be in his corner rooting for him.

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